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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)****REPORT****OF THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING “TOWARDS EQUITY IN URBAN SOCIAL  
POLICIES: SOCIAL GUIDE FOR URBAN OBSERVATORIES”  
BEIRUT, 20-21 NOVEMBER 2008****Summary**

The Social Development Division (SDD) of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized the expert group meeting “Towards Equity in Urban Social Policies: Social Guide for Urban Observatories” under the programme of work of the Social Policy in the City Team. The main purpose of this meeting was to review the proposed framework for the Social Guide for Urban Observatories, with the following goals:

(a) To explore expert opinion on the framework of indicators proposed in the Guide, their various components and ways of improving them. The experts dealt in their papers, presentations and discussions with the complex problems that urban observatories will be monitoring and addressed the course of social policy in terms of its relationship to sustainable urban development;

(b) To deepen knowledge of the situation in the Arab countries, especially their conception of urban policy and the dynamics of their urban settings, and problems related to the “institutionalization” of the urban observatories, all by conducting research and arriving at fresh results.

The meeting took place over two days. The interventions made on the first day and the workshops held on the second dealt with three main issues: (a) the Social Guide; (b) local authorities; and (c) urban observatories already established in the Arab countries. The sessions, five in total, culminated in a set of proposals which appear later in this report.

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## **Introduction**

1. Recent decades have witnessed a tangible growth in the consensus of both experts and decision makers around the thesis that cities have begun to be transformed into essential centres of economic and social power, at the expense of nation states. This new situation paves the way for the emergence of many significant opportunities for urban development. However, these opportunities are undermined by the existence of several serious challenges that threaten the quality of life in urban settlements, such as the increase in poverty and the spread of shantytowns, the deterioration in the quality of the urban environment, the increase in violence and in social, ethnic, religious and cultural tensions, and the steady fragmentation of the urban fabric.
2. Urban observatories are unique tools for oversight and monitoring. They work to collect data, develop indicators and carry out social analysis. The fruits of their work may prove crucially important for policymakers as they help them better understand urban problems, identify trends and monitor urban policies, all through a sophisticated analytical framework.
3. Urban observatories face a set of challenges, of which the most important are:
  - (a) Incorporating an analysis of public policy, both general and urban, within the framework of the indicators used and the research undertaken by urban observatories;
  - (b) Identifying particular indicators that would be useful in analysing general public and specifically urban policy, and the likelihood of their being added to the indicators adopted by UN-Habitat and elsewhere;
  - (c) Determining the methodologies necessary for collecting indicator-related data;
  - (d) Defining the usefulness of the indicators in relation to the tasks that different stakeholders assume, whether at the central or local level;
  - (e) Determining the adequacy of the indicators in meeting the needs of users and addressing their most pressing current and future concerns;
  - (f) Developing homogenous indicators for Arab cities, in consultation and cooperation with the various users, now and in the future.
4. To this purpose, the Social Guide for Urban Observatories is being prepared as a methodological guide aimed at assisting the urban observatories in the ESCWA region to build their indicator analysis framework. This framework will help to clarify the major social problems and various urban social trends as well as offering a suitable framework for monitoring the totality of urban policies, in light of the principles which could help guide them towards more sustainable patterns of development.

## **I. RECOMMENDATIONS**

5. The participants concluded with a set of general recommendations for the Social Guide for Urban Observatories, the kinds of urban observatories found in Arab cities and the relationship of these observatories to Government agencies and authorities. The attendees addressed their recommendations to Governments and to United Nations agencies.

### **A. RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO GOVERNMENTS**

- (a) Urge Governments to support existing observatories and to establish new ones;
- (b) Urge decision makers, local Governments and municipalities to hold meetings, exchange

expertise and conduct comparisons of the statutes and laws governing social development oversight, planning and implementation mechanisms;

(c) Networking between observatories in order to exchange expertise and coordinate the creation of uniform methodologies in the Arab region.

#### B. RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO ESCWA AND UN-HABITAT

(a) Prepare studies on the financial, administrative and legal status of existing observatories in the region, in order to identify and publicize successful experiences;

(b) Conduct field studies on the relationship of the urban observatories to local authorities in the urban administration process;

(c) Hold expert workshops to discuss the details and the different chapters of the Guide that ESCWA is proposing;

(d) Carry out some of the practical applications with development partners and local authorities, in order to test the methodology of the proposed Guide;

(e) Cooperate with the relevant Arab organizations in studying existing urban observatories, inspiring and educating the public about their importance and employing the indicators in urban planning and in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);

(f) Disseminate notices and other promotional materials pointing out the importance of establishing urban observatories in Arab cities.

## II. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

6. The interventions made on the first day of the meeting and the workshops organized on the second day dealt with three main topics: (a) the Social Guide; (b) local authorities; and (c) existing urban observatories in the Arab world.

### TOPIC 1. THE SOCIAL GUIDE

#### A. INTERVENTIONS: METHODS AND STRUCTURE OF THE GUIDE

1. *Analysis of social policies and their relationship to the components of the framework:  
Levels, designations and indicators*

7. Mr. Joseph Salamon, expert in local development, urbanism and social policy, made a presentation on the relationship of social policy to the components of the methodological framework proposed in the Guide. The main purpose of this presentation was to determine the effectiveness of the framework in monitoring social policies in an urban context. Mr. Salamon chose for this purpose the policy, taken from France, of public participation in the process of social sustainability. He concluded his presentation by distributing the parameters according to the framework proposed in the Guide and linking them with the development and sustainability indicators as an indication of the effectiveness of the Social Guide in monitoring public policy and the areas of its application in cities. He also noted that the methodology followed in the Guide requires public policies to be defined and derived scientifically by focusing on aspects of their practical application according to a set of designations and levels.

8. These elements have been identified according to a set of designations, then converted into indicators for use in the proposed Guide, and rest on the identification of public policies. Mr. Salamon defined these

policies as representing a social vision for achieving a more equitable social system by putting in place administrative, financial and legal mechanisms and tools, on the one hand, and as a focus on a “reference” that identifies their geographical and social context, on the other. The reference, according to Mr. Salamon, has both a structure and determinants. The structure consists of data, information, individuals and values, while the determinants are three: (a) the cognitive dimension, which involves change factors and problem-solving elements (challenges, problems and goals); (b) the cultural dimension, which comprises basic problem-solving values (principles and laws); and (c) the agency dimension, which involves active political forces and their policymaking tools (the individuals involved, mechanisms used and human and material possibilities).

9. Mr. Salamon stated that social policies can be analysed by studying or following the components (levels, determinants and indicators) of the framework proposed in the Guide as long as it is made really meaningful by covering all the public political determinants, especially the cognitive, cultural and agency dimension. He considers that these dimensions can imbue the components of the framework with scientific and holistic significance, thus enabling them to provide a working methodology that can bring out the problems and real challenges of each society, according to its time and place.

### *2. Comparative analysis of types of indicator frameworks as a mechanism for monitoring and analysis*

10. Mr. Jihad Farah, lecturer at Lebanese University, gave a presentation in which he addressed the indicators used in the world observatories, pointing out their strengths and weaknesses. For Mr. Farah, the Guide deals with indicators that are distributed across designations and levels that overlap with urban social policies on stabilization, environmental equity and good governance, on the one hand, and such social sectors as education and health, on the other.

11. Mr. Farah’s intervention dealt with the following approaches: (a) the policy-focused approach (UN-Habitat’s Global Observatory); (b) the sector-focused approach (economic and service sectors); and (c) the system-focused approach (administrative). Mr. Farah identified the most important indicators as follows: (a) performance indicators; (b) issue indicators; (c) needs indicators. He defined the frameworks as organizational indicator structures that link what is useful in the indicators with the subject to be measured and its performance. The position of the frameworks varies according to their composition and methodology. The basic difference between them goes back to different conceptions of how to deal with the issues to be measured by the competent body and of how to approach their dimensions and their interrelationships. Mr. Farah gave examples of the areas of use of the frameworks and discussed each of them. He stated that the framework chosen for the Guide serves its purpose, namely, analysis of public urban policies with the aim of achieving equity and sustainable development of a comprehensive and cross-sector nature.

12. Next, Mr. Mohamed Abdu Al-Salem, General Supervisor of the urban observatory of the Jeddah Governorate Municipality, gave a presentation on the experience of the Jeddah city observatory. He indicated that the latest survey covered the status and needs of around 12,000 families, noting the importance of providing pre-agreed criteria for comparison, such as the poverty line and a family’s basic requirements according to population areas.

### *3. Analysis of social policy and its relationship to urban problems such as urban poverty*

13. Mr. Adeb Naameh, Advisor with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), spoke about the importance of the Social Guide for monitoring urban problems, especially urban poverty at the local level. He stressed that the observatories were an instrument in the service of local institutions and authorities. It was therefore up to each observatory to deal with urban problems in its own particular way. By the same token, it is not possible to apply global indicators at the local level. In the absence of a general framework for the work of the observatories and of mechanisms for interacting with the local authorities, the observatories are able to deal with urban problems in a direct way which reflects the characteristics and size of the region.

Mr. Naameh touched on the need to educate official bodies on the importance of monitoring information in order to meet the basic needs of the urban poor.

#### 4. *General discussion*

14. The experts discussed a number of related topics, including the insufficient number of observatories in Arab cities and the need to establish them in more than 40 cities. Their work would be, among other things, to gather data and information on the environment and good governance, depending on the region. Discussion also focused on the need to raise the awareness of decision makers and convince them of the importance of setting up national observatories and coordinating between them.

#### B. THE WORKSHOP

15. General questions about the Social Guide were elicited in this forum where discussion took place about the supervisory and monitoring activities of the observatories and their equipment.

##### 1. *General queries about the Guide*

16. General questions about the Social Guide were elicited in this forum, especially the following:

- (a) How to ensure that the proposed methodology is fully able to serve the purposes of the Guide;
- (b) How to ensure that the proposed framework structure, with its components and parameters, is presented as a comprehensive and complete description of the phenomena under study and that it serves the social policymaking process;
- (c) How to improve data-gathering without losing the overall significance of the indicators.

##### 2. *Oversight and monitoring activities*

17. The speakers arrived at the thesis that any monitoring activity required the following:

- (a) Identification of some of the expectations and/or criteria for one area of oversight, namely, sustainable development in the structure of the urban observatories;
- (b) Familiarity with the performance of one of the official systems capable of achieving these results, such as the urban apparatuses or local or municipal authorities;
- (c) The possibility of intervening in the performance of the existing system in order to make changes or corrections to it, for purposes of decision-making or policy formation;
- (d) The ability to follow up on the monitoring process itself.

##### 3. *Monitoring tools*

18. The experts agreed that undertaking any of the monitoring activities required familiarity with the monitoring tools and that the indicator frames constituted one example of these tools. The framework proposed in the Guide puts forward/offers different parameters that the participants consider essential to conducting a useful analysis of the dimensions of the problem (urban poverty, for example).

#### 4. *Proposals*

##### (a) *Naming the Guide*

19. The name “Social Guide” is a general name which may not accord with the particular areas covered in the Guide. For this reason, the participants considered giving the guide the name “Urban Equity Guide”, though this term did not gain acceptance. The second name proposed, “City Development Guide”, is acceptable for expanding the idea of the Guide, as is the name “Urban Observatory Development Guide”

##### (b) *Methodological aims of the Guide*

20. The discussion revolved around the need for the Guide to create tools for analysis to be used by all urban observatories. The proposed methodology (level, determinant, indicator) had demonstrated its effectiveness with regard to a number of urban topics. Also discussed was the idea that the Guide was tantamount to a road map and that it used directions and not prescriptions or laws imposed from above. Hence the need for it to be a flexible guide, a discussion tool open to ideas from those concerned, especially given that its flexible structure and content make it an educational and enabling tool for urban observatories.

## **TOPIC 2. LOCAL AUTHORITIES: IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY OF SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND GOVERNANCE**

### **A. INTERVENTIONS: THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY OF SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND GOVERNANCE**

#### *1. Urban governance as a framework for decision-making and implementation*

21. Mr. Mosbah Rajab, head of the Urban Planning Department at Lebanese University, dealt with Lebanon’s experience with urban projects in his presentation entitled “Urban governance as a framework for decision-making and implementation processes based on the principle of social sustainability and the particularities of locality”. Mr. Rajab noted the absence of both the administrative and implementation frameworks in the task of identifying needs, formulating development plans and assisting decision-making. He believed that, as a result, local authorities were suffering from the multiplicity of parties responsible for implementing the projects in their municipal jurisdiction, in the absence of any previous coordination with them or among them and in the absence of practical mechanisms giving such projects the stamp of sustainability. Mr. Rajab pointed to the many problems that this situation imposed on the political and planning bodies concerned with developing their regions, which forced them to invent new methodologies to contribute to generating solutions. In this regard, examples were given of reconstruction projects in the southern suburbs after the 2006 war and in downtown Beirut. Questions were also asked about the extent of the relationship of this methodology to official bodies and the flexibility of the legal apparatuses for reusing them in other areas. Specifically, some wondered how much independence civil associations were allowed in decision-making related to the southern suburbs and about the possibility of developing the methodologies and using them in assimilating the projects and incorporating them into the development policies adopted in the reconstruction of downtown Beirut. Mr. Rajab concluded with the need to provide effective frameworks that could be developed and used to assimilate the projects and incorporate them into sustainable development projects such as those proposed in the Guide. He noted the need to hold more meetings that brought decision makers face-to-face with the challenges that existed and had them contribute to developing and implementing mechanisms that promote sustainable development.

#### *2. Regulatory and decision-making methods for urban authorities*

22. Former UNDP advisor Mr. Darem Al-Bassam gave a presentation entitled “On the arrangements governing the decision-making patterns of urban authorities in Arab countries: Identifying determinates, methods and impact on social sustainability”. Mr. Al-Bassam asked a fundamental question, namely, how to

conceptualize the decision-making process within urban authorities, the city being an institutional, economic, social and environmental order in constant flux. It is therefore appropriate that the monitoring process should give weight to the element of time in realizing the dimension of sustainability. Mr. Al-Bassam then touched on the weakness of all the existing arrangements for research put forward in the Arab region, the most important of which are as follows:

(a) As regards the institutional setting: (1) the lack of independence of local administrations in decision-making and insufficient decentralization. This reduces the efficiency and effectiveness of local action and eliminates the role of spontaneous initiatives and popular participation in decision-making; (2) the absence of horizontal and vertical coordination in the planning process between the governorates and the ministries concerned with sector-specific planning and likewise between the governorates and the cities and municipalities under them; (3) lack of clear models and plans for determining the needs of the population, telecommunications and infrastructure requirements and the potential for future expansion; (4) lack of an enabling environment for private sector action and of a strong partnership relationship between the private sector and local authorities;

(b) With regard to the economic order: (1) the inability of city and town administrations to finance themselves, and their dependency on the central authority, thus weakening them as decision-making bodies; (2) disparities in the provision of public services and utilities in the governorates, which affects the balance of the local development process and constitutes bias in favour of the major cities;

(c) As regards the social setting: (1) the lack of local strategies and programmes aimed at ending poverty and raising the level of the lowest-growth regions; (2) the inadequacy of programmes aimed at the advancement of women, especially illiterate women and those taking care of the family; (3) the lack of special microfinancing programmes aimed at improving the living standards of poor people and families; (4) the lack of local participation in social welfare programmes;

(d) As regards the environmental situation: (1) the lack of a clear vision for land use; (2) the haphazard and unsystematic expansion of residential agglomerations around cities and the lack of urban vitality in many Arab cities as a result of haphazard expansion; (3) the widespread phenomenon of environmental deterioration as a result of water, air and soil pollution, leading to unsustainability.

23. In connection with the proposals that he put forward to address these shortcomings, Mr. Al-Bassam pointed to the need to make available an effective and high-performing local administration transparent in its dealings with citizens and with the private sector, in order to safeguard the economic environment and to ensure a suitable infrastructure for implementing sustainable growth.

### 3. *General discussion*

24. In their discussion, participants focused on how to build the necessary structure for the sustainability of new projects, and the potential for providing a methodology that could be applied in different regions, given that the research into the use of a particular methodology requires more follow-up and field work to examine the facts at the local level. Hence there was a need to spread the idea of urban observatories and an urgent need to convince decision makers of their importance.

#### B. THE WORKSHOP

25. The general discussion on this topic revolved around mechanisms for governance and its processes, political decision-making and local development; knowledge about how social, administrative and political mechanisms and systems affect the achievement of the ultimate goal; knowledge of the methodologies that urban authorities use in Arab cities to make their decisions and to implement and follow up on their policies in a way consistent with sufficient and accurate data. The linkages between public policy and urban development were clarified in detail, as were the concept of urban observatories and the mechanisms of

urban governments and local authorities. The discussion concluded with the formulation of a number of proposals and conclusions.

1. *The relationship between public policy and urban development*

26. Equity, or equality, and social justice constitute a major goal for any urban social policy, behind the broader goal which is urban governance and sustainable development. The opposite is also true, namely, that sustainable development is a major goal of any urban social policy, behind social cohesion and greater equity or “social justice”.

2. *The urban observatories*

27. It was stressed at the meeting that any project aiming to establish an urban observatory, especially if it is devoted to monitoring the social conditions of the population needs to specify the standards that determine the social condition desired and to know how urban mechanisms affect, positively or negatively, the realization of these standards.

3. *The mechanisms of urban governance and local authorities*

28. The mechanisms of urban governance and local authorities call for: (a) knowledge of the mechanisms of governance and their operations, political decision-making, local development and the dynamics and characteristics of local governance; and (b) knowledge of how the urban social, administrative and political mechanisms and systems affect the achievement of the ultimate goal and of the ways and means with which urban authorities make their decisions in Arab cities and monitor them in accordance with documented data.

4. *Proposals*

29. With regard to this topic, the participants made a number of recommendations, most importantly: (a) the holding of consultative meetings, both regional and local, to include decision makers at the highest levels, in order to discuss the decision-making mechanisms and patterns followed for achieving social sustainability; and (b) developing indicators capable of measuring the social sustainability dimensions of urban planning, taking into consideration the relationship to the reality that is being monitored and the alternatives available for urban decision-making.

**TOPIC 3. EXISTING URBAN OBSERVATORIES IN THE ARAB COUNTRIES**

**A. INTERVENTIONS: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL URBAN OBSERVATORIES AND THE LINKAGES BETWEEN THEM**

1. *Urban observatories: different experiences in the Arab world*

30. Mr. Hatem Taha, Secretary of the Urban Observatory of Al Madinah Al Monawara Municipality, gave a presentation entitled “Different experiences in the Arab world and special proposals for institutionalizing the observatories’ operations and procedures” in which he reviewed the experience of the municipality in this regard. He noted the importance of the services that the urban observatory provided in managing urban development to those making decisions about urban, social, and environmental development and local administrative matters. The observatory converts special data in every area into information that helps decision makers to take decisions and formulate the necessary policies at all levels.

31. Mr. Taha pointed to the institutional structure of the urban observatory, in which teams from Government, private sector and civil society administrations contribute to overseeing the processes of producing and studying the indicators. The most important issues that have been monitored and researched since the establishment of the observatory in 2004, such as the rise in infant mortality and poverty rates, the

disparity in income levels and the stability of the family, relate to social development. In terms of urban development and housing, a study was undertaken on the issues surrounding the poor distribution of services and its causes. Mr. Taha reviewed the issue of youth crime as a model for using the indicators in development policies. He concluded by saying that the most important problems that the observatory faced were translating the databases into indicators so as to benefit from them in situations related to health and child mortality.

## *2. The Arab observatory network*

32. Mr. Ali Shbou, head of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, made an intervention entitled “The Arab Observatory Network under UN Habitat: between the MDGs and local programmes”. He stressed the importance of creating the Social Guide for Urban Observatories and setting in operation the Arab Observatory Network agreed in Vancouver based on the Framework for Regional Cooperation on Urban Observatories. This was extremely important as part of the initiative to incorporate these social perspectives in the drafting of policies and for sustainable urban administration at the city, considering that the Social Guide to Urban Observatories was the first step in broadening the scope for developing an effective network of Arab observatories. This network could help to advance the analysis of urban social policies at the regional level.

33. In order for the Arab Observatory Network to be effective in achieving more harmonious cities in accordance with the new directives of UN-Habitat, the following steps should be taken: (a) Identify clear methodologies for gathering and analysing data; (b) take specific measures towards establishing the urban observatories; (c) build frameworks for cooperation capable of achieving harmony in the work of these observatories in order to build important databases at the city, state and region levels. Finally, Mr. Shbou noted the life happiness index that the State of Bhutan was constructing. Then discussion focused on how to measure this indicator and the extent of its effectiveness in the Arab countries. There was also an exploration of the problem of translating the databases provided by the urban observatories into social indicators that could be of benefit in the formulation of social policies.

## **B. THE WORKSHOP**

34. Discussion of the urban observatories existing in the Arab countries revolved around the following: (a) the financial, administrative and legal centre for the different kinds of urban observatories existing in the Arab cities; (b) the relationship of these observatories to Government agencies and authorities, scientific directorates, and official and unofficial organizations; (c) the processes involved in institutionalizing the different kinds of observatories found in Arab cities; and (d) the level of cooperation between urban observatories in the Arab world.

35. The problems that were evoked in the context of this issue also focused on the role of international organizations in urban monitoring and on the issues surrounding Arab urban observatories. The discussion arrived at a number of proposals and conclusions.

### *1. The role of international organizations in urban monitoring*

36. The Guide is part of the global programme of urban observatories of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements – Habitat (UNCHS) established in 1999. The Guide is an activity which will continue and develop in the framework of partnership with UN-Habitat and the Arab Towns Organization with the aim of working to propagate the idea of local urban observatories in the Arab countries. And this calls for: (a) the formulation of sustainable urban strategies and for overseeing and monitoring the economic, social and environmental development of cities; (b) the development of an apparatus at the local level for overseeing and monitoring the MDGs; and (c) improving the performance of local municipalities.

## 2. *Issues surrounding the Arab urban observatories*

37. Among the major issues that concern the Arab urban observatories are the following: (a) the financial, administrative and legal situation of the various kinds of urban observatories in the Arab cities; (b) the relationship of these observatories to Government agencies and authorities, scientific directorates, and official and unofficial organizations; (c) institutionalizing the different kinds of observatories existing in the Arab cities; and (d) raising the level of cooperation between the urban observatories in the Arab countries.

## 3. *Proposals*

38. Attendees of the meeting arrived at a number of proposals, of which the most important are as follows:

(a) The need to prepare a comprehensive study on the urban observatories in the Arab cities, with the aim of assessing their performance, to look into the shortcomings that impede the development of their role and to network between the social actors concerned with this role.

(b) The hosting by the municipality of Beirut of a workshop on setting up urban observatories and developing them locally, in the hope that the results of this workshop will contribute to the establishment of local observatories in the city of Beirut, constituting a space in which the expert group can work on gathering, analysing and correcting the indicators, in accordance with the urban indicators as announced by UN-Habitat.

## **III. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING**

### A. DATE AND VENUE

39. The expert group meeting entitled “Towards Equity in Urban Social Policies: the Social Guide for Urban Observatories” was held at United Nations House on 20-21 November 2008.

### B. OPENING

40. Mr. Walid Hilal, Officer-in-charge of SDD, opened the Expert Group Meeting on the Social Guide for Urban Observatories with a statement in which he welcomed the participants and conveyed to them the greetings of Mr. Badr AlDafa, Executive Secretary of ESCWA, and his wishes for their success. Mr. Hilal stated that the 21<sup>st</sup> century was distinguished by being the century of the city and that the current situation was paving the way for the emergence of many important opportunities for urban development. However, these opportunities could collapse due to a number of challenges threatening the quality of city life, including: increasing poverty and the spread of shantytowns, the deteriorating quality of the urban environment, increasing violence, and social, ethnic, religious and cultural tensions. The most important of all these was the continued crumbling of the “urban fabric”. Confronting these challenges meant adopting sound urban policy and urban administration strategies. In order for urban policy to work, it had to rely on effective tools for analysing urban performance, using accurate and up-to-date information on the main factors affecting these policies and on the main urban performance indicators of environmental, economic and social conditions and trends.

41. Mr. Hilal said that urban observatories were good tools for oversight and monitoring, because they worked to gather data, develop indicators and carry out social analysis. He saw the importance of their role in relation to policymakers, because they help in understanding urban problems, identifying trends in urbanization and monitoring urban policies by means of a sophisticated analytical framework. Mr. Hilal also noted that ESCWA’s aim, by means of the expert group meeting, was to engender a discussion of the frameworks proposed in the Social Guide to Urban Observatories and that this Guide was concerned with enabling the urban observatories in the ESCWA region, activating their role in urban policymaking and enhancing the framework for partnership and negotiation with regard to these policies.

42. Next, Ms. Bayan Tabbara, Leader of the Social Policy in the City Team, made a statement in which she welcomed the attendees and noted the importance of monitoring and compiling the data needed to promote equity in social policy in Arab cities for the purpose of sustainability. She also spoke of the need for local authorities and Governments to pay heed to urban observatories in order to obtain the information needed for sound planning.

43. Finally, Mr. Leon Televizian, researcher and urban planning and local development expert, made a general and detailed presentation on the Social Guide to Urban Observatories. The presentation was in two parts of which the first dealt with the contents of the Guide, specifically overall goals, shortcomings and existing challenges, while the second part addressed the intellectual and applied methods of the Guide.

44. Following are the main points of the first part:

(a) The Guide comes under the partnership framework that has existed between UN-Habitat, the Arab Towns Organization and ESCWA since 1999. It aims to propagate more urban observatories and to develop them such that they become capable of monitoring and overseeing the achievement of the MDGs, on the one hand, and local performance improvement, on the other;

(b) ESCWA's aim in publishing the Guide is to better devise and analyse public social policy in order to reduce inequity and ensure social sustainability.

(c) The work of the observatories suffers from three main shortcomings: (1) a plethora of sector-specific issues and data unconnected to any integrated and comprehensive approach; (2) discrepancies between observatories in terms of their programmes of work, which are in some cases regional and in others national, but only rarely urban; and (3) the absence of a methodological framework capable of offering an integrated reading in the process aimed at assimilating the indicators developed by global institutions (UN-Habitat) or sector-specific ones (economic);

(d) The activation of observatories in the ESCWA region faces challenges in the following areas: (1) standardizing social policy concepts and ways of treating social issues; (2) defining and quantifying social issues and the concepts surrounding them; (3) the effectiveness of local authorities and administrations in taking ownership of policies and services in order to achieve social goals; (4) the accuracy of information and its adequacy for helping cities assess their ability to prepare plans and negotiate them with central Governments; and (5) the ability of local authorities, technically and administratively, to assimilate the MDGs; and (6) the inability of local authorities to achieve their goals, to make room for greater participation with citizens and to create effective partnerships with civil society and the private sector.

45. Following are the most important points of the second part.

46. Presented in this part are sections representing the theoretical and applied method used in response to the need for the Guide and to its role in designing public policies and creating sustainable development, and hence equity, in cities and towns. The first section shows that the Guide falls, in a wider and multilateral domain, into a dynamic hierarchy that endures in the service of formulating equitable public policies, in harmony with the directions set by UN-Habitat and the MDGs. What this means is that the Guide is a methodological addition to what already exists in the way of urban observatories and current public policy. The second section describes the status and nature of the Guide, explains its main connections and dynamics, and shows the process of making, implementing and monitoring decisions, thanks to how different elements of the process interact with each other. This section identifies the dynamic relationship between a political entity, such as a municipality or any other official decision-making entity, and any one of the monitoring points. It is stated in this section that the proposed Guide is merely a set of sequential links within a broader programme in which other entities participate, according to different criteria and levels, and connect them together by means of vectors of exchange and implementation.

47. The third section offers a model which makes clear the overall idea of the Guide, especially with regard to the system, the constituent elements and the outcome. This is because any given urban political entity, such as a municipality or local system, constitutes a link connecting the observatory and the urban administration. It connects with the higher political entities by means of a dynamic relationship. Intellectually, this model does not just cover different areas of political institutions, the urban administration, and social policies and observatories; it also defines the framework of their action, tracing the boundaries of the logical linkages between the elements of the Guide, without isolating them from the rest of the model in its broader scope, which gives these elements meaning and clear results in the process of achieving a model of sustainable urban development. The fourth section represents the Guide's applied methodology, used in order to develop the capabilities of the urban observatories in the ESCWA region in their broader scope, that of laying down the necessary foundations for moving to a more sustainable model of development. From this point of departure, the Guide constitutes a framework for an issue-based approach. This approach breaks the problem down into sets of indicators that better inform us about the current status of the problem.

48. In concluding his intervention, Mr. Televizian made several points: the proposed framework is issue-based and has acquired a multi-parameter structure through the use of a set of levels to break down the complexity of the problem; the social and political determinants are based on the principles of a sustainable model of urban development; and indicators highlight the prevailing social situation and the policies applied as they relate to a sustainable model of urban development. He stressed that the Social Guide to Urban Observatories was a tool under development by SDD at ESCWA. The Guide aimed, first of all, to offer indicators to assist in analysing urban challenges and assessing social, urban policies and trends through a new perspective of social development. Secondly, the Guide sought to foster the observatories by means of guidelines that enhance their organizational and analytical capabilities, thus transforming them from being mere data-collectors into advisory bodies on urban social development issues.

### C. PARTICIPANTS

49. The meeting was attended by experts from Arab countries and United Nations agencies and experts specializing in urban planning and monitoring. A detailed list of participants can be found in the annex to this report.

Annex\*

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