

Round table (1) on Urban Planning, Legislation and Governance

Governance is the enabling environment that requires adequate legal frameworks, efficient political, managerial and administrative processes, as well as mechanisms, guidelines and tools to enable the local government response to the needs and welfare of citizens. It is in fact a process of decision-making that engages various actors with different priorities to ensure that rules are made and enforced, development is realized and services delivered. It is therefore a continuous process that informs the success of a city system.

Rapid urbanization and population growth raised many challenges regarding spatial distribution of population and resources, largely due to the absence of urban planning strategies, frameworks and coordination. Population growth tends to result in large conurbations and urban sprawl. As municipalities' cores become largely overcrowded, residents tend to escape it by occupying land in surrounding urban centers - often lack accompanying services, amenities and infrastructure - which poses a major issue in the urbanization process in both developed and developing countries. On one hand, lack of land policies and clear regulations lead to uncoordinated city growth and the upsurge of informal settlements, while on the other hand, excessive regulations such as strict zoning – the organization of urban space in exclusive residential, commercial, or industrial areas – can result in urban sprawl and horizontal, low density expansion of urban spaces. Both situations inhibit the development of smart cities.

As a result, pressure on land and natural resources — as well as mobility and energy constraints — start to have a negative effect on the urban economy and overall efficiency of the city region. This is especially true in developing countries, where an increasing share of economic activities and employment opportunities take place in urban areas and cities, attracting large parts of a country's job seeking population. In addition to the growing difference between urban and rural wages, which causes rapid rural-to-urban migration.

Our Cities are burdened by laws that do not match urban needs and weak institutional capacity at national and local level to enforce the laws and regulations. Moreover, the multiplicity and rigidity of laws and regulations compel citizens to pursue informal routes to conduct land and property transactions, to do business, to acquire means of a livelihood, and even to access basic services. As a result, parallel systems flourish and Urban Legal informality becomes the norm.

During this discussion, the following themes could be tackled for a better understanding of the topic:

- Sustainable urban planning and design
- Efficient Urban land use and management
- National and local authorities and decentralization
- Local economic development
- Inclusive economic growth
- Urban and municipal finance
- Job security and employment
- Civic engagement and participatory approaches
- Access to land, land tenure and ownership
- Intermediate cities and city expansion and densification

To register to this roundtable, please fill in the registration form until: 22nd of November 2014.