

REGIONAL INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SUPPORT TO PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES TO STRENGTHEN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PACIFIC URBAN AGENDA UNDER THE PACIFIC PLAN

URBANIZATION IN THE PACIFIC REGION

Rapid urbanization is a phenomenon shared by all Pacific Island countries. As of 2013 there were 10,565,837 people in the Pacific region, with the population of individual cities ranging from 254,158 in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, to just 1,497 in the small urban centre of Yaren, Nauru. In half of the United Nations (UN) member Pacific Island countries, the majority of people already live in urban areas, and this proportion will only increase in the future. As Pacific Island economies have developed, an increasing share of national wealth (GDP) is produced in urban areas. Urban economic activities have also strengthened the viability of rural economic development by providing markets, agro-industrial production, processing centres and trans-shipment points for rural produce.

However, the sheer speed and impact of the transformation, and the inadequate legal and planning frameworks currently in place to manage this growth, have led to relentless urban expansion, intensive energy use, widening inequality, limited livelihood opportunities and increasing vulnerability to climate change impacts. As a result, there is an urgent need to promote an urbanization model in the Pacific that is people-centred and harnesses balanced development to ensure more equitable service delivery and improve the quality of life for all citizens.

The Pacific Urban Agenda - An Action Plan for the Region

The Pacific Urban Agenda (PUA) was developed in 2003 to address emerging urbanization issues in the region. Endorsed by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in 2004 and by the Pacific Island Forum Leaders in 2005, the PUA was later reviewed and approved by the Pacific Urban Forum in 2007. The PUA focuses on five major priority areas:

- Institutional framework: urban policy development;
- Building capacity;
- Advocacy and political commitment;
- Infrastructure and services;
- Quality of life: environment, health, sustainable livelihoods.

Objectives and Scope of the Regional Support Project

The overall objectives of this project are to strengthen capacity for urban development and settlement upgrading, build a regional knowledge base to help individual countries in meeting their commitments to the PUA and associated national goals, facilitate and integrate policy discussions into regional and national planning, and strengthen monitoring of the implementation of the PUA. The Regional Support project is implemented through five components:

- 1: Regional needs assessment and analysis;
- 2: Institutional strengthening through targeted training;
- 3: Urban knowledge creation and management;
- 4: Policy learning dialogues on Pacific urbanization;
- 5: Capacity development in monitoring urban initiatives under the Pacific Plan.



Expected outcomes of the Regional Support Project

- **in the short term**, the project will increase the exposure of policy makers, planners and other urban actors to targeted training and policy dialogue on key activities such as City Development Strategies and Slum Upgrading Strategies, and promote the development of practical toolkits and dissemination of good practices. Parallel to this will be a focus on strengthening the capacity of countries and agencies to better respond to and integrate the PUA into national and regional plans, and monitor implementation using quantifiable data. It is hoped that it will encourage more coherent and collaborative efforts from development partners to address urbanization issues.

- **in the longer term**, the project will support the up-scaling and replication of key processes such as City Development Strategies and Slum Upgrading Strategies, and help guide the formulation of effective and well resourced policies. This should lead to better functioning and more efficient urban areas which address the needs of the urban poor and contribute to the broader economic, social and environmental development of the nation.

Capacity Building

A Toolbox USB (containing materials on development strategies, settlement upgrading, urban sector profiling, climate change, infrastructure financing and financial management) consolidated with outputs from Cities Alliance, the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) and other global/regional partners is a valuable resource for stakeholders. To implement capacity development and institutional strengthening, UN-Habitat has supported a number of events and other training opportunities covering issues such as housing policy, climate change adaptation, urban planning, land readjustment and land based financing.

Policy Learning Dialogues

Responding to country requests for more peer learning exchanges supported by global good practices, a number of regional urban fora were designed to maximize collaboration through inter-country knowledge sharing. For example, the regional support project facilitated a Pacific Housing Workshop.

Educational Outreach

In 2013, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the University of the South Pacific, a workshop on 'Promoting the Right to Adequate Housing in Melanesia' was held with the support of the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS) to educate journalists on the role of the media in raising public awareness and facilitating policy debate on key housing challenges in the sub-region.