

URBAN UPGRADING IN IRAN



Zahedan slum, Iran

In September 2002, the government of Iran and the National Habitat Committee applied to the Cities Alliance for assistance with the development of a national approach to slum upgrading. With the support of the World Bank, the request was presented as a desire to move from isolated, project-based activities to participatory, citywide programmes across all the urban areas of the country. To this end, a modest Cities Alliance grant was approved for the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to facilitate a national dialogue on slum upgrading to formulate a new national policy approach.

Some 21 per cent of Iran's population of 65 million lives below the national poverty line. With more than 65 per cent of the population already urbanised, this poverty manifests itself physically in informal settlements and slums around cities and towns. The Iranian government anticipates that if current trends persist, the number of people living in informal settlements will double during the next decade.

Local governments have not, however, been in a strong position to respond to these challenges: even though the Iranian constitution assigns major roles to elected local councils, this provision has not been comprehensively implemented. Recently, the process of decentralisation has gained momentum and is likely to be the main thrust of the Fourth Development Plan. This process will also need to improve upon current institutional arrangements,

which are characterised by fragmented decision-making and responsibilities, resulting in multiple and disjointed housing programmes.

Nevertheless, a sound start has been made with the Iranian Cabinet's adoption of a national strategy for enabling and regularising informal settlements, the most tangible output of the Cities Alliance assistance. This policy statement is notable for the clarity with which it identifies the main cause of informal settlements: failures of policy and governance:

'In reality, the creation and expansion of informal settlements is either the direct result of ineffective current macro policies pertaining to the provision of housing and related services for lower-income groups or the failure of such existing policies, which is exacerbated by abrupt population displacement caused by natural disasters or war. Weak urban management, profiteering, and contradictory decisions in allowing or resisting such settlements at the micro level further compound the situation'.²²

The policy response to this situation takes, as its starting point, two principles of the Iranian constitution: Number 3, which refers to the creation of a suitable environment for improving ethics, eradicating discrimination, and ensuring equitable conditions for all citizens, and Number 31, which refers to the universal right of all to suitable shelter, with priority to be given to the needy.

From this beginning, the policy document outlines the following three main objectives:

- The provision of a safe, healthy living and working environment that secures human dignity, faith, and social participation in an inclusive and sustainable manner.
- The provision of accessible and affordable infrastructure and basic services for all so as to reduce differences in the quality of life in the settlements and in the rest of the city.
- The preservation of the environment and of Iran's cultural heritage through participation by

²² The editors have made minor, nonsubstantive adjustments to the text, which was translated from Farsi.

residents of the settlements in decisionmaking and local operations.

The policy document then outlines a series of guiding principles that focus on, among other things, the need to revise current policies, use local resources, recognise secure tenure, and support the roles and duties of local city management.

This policy statement constituted the framework for a recently negotiated US\$80 million World Bank loan to Iran designed to support the implementation of an integrated approach to upgrading informal settlements and lay the foundations for more fundamental housing sector reforms over the next five years.

ROLE OF CDS IN MOROCCO'S TETOUAN REGION



Koraat Sbaa neighbourhood, Tetouan, Morocco

Municipal governance in Morocco was strengthened significantly through recent decentralisation legislation and municipal elections in September 2003, which increased local governments' administrative and fiscal responsibilities. All five communes that make up the metropolitan region of Tetouan view the CDS approach as a useful vehicle for taking advantage of the changes and preparing a long-term vision for economic growth and poverty reduction. While the region's economic potential is significant, in the past, local authorities did not have the mandate to co-operate beyond their administrative boundaries, and thus could not take advantage of the synergies and economies of scale inherent in a concerted approach for the whole region.

The national government has selected the Tetouan region for substantial investments in the transport sector, including a new harbour for car ferries, a new tourism zone, and the Tangiers-Tetouan highway. In addition, Tetouan will be a satellite location for a planned regional investment centre. The government's Villes sans Bidonvilles initiative will also invest in upgrading 22 informal settlements in the Tetouan metropolitan region. Because of the involvement of the national government in the region's investments, a close link has been established with the governor of the region.

The launch of the Tetouan CDS last year during an election period initiated public debate about the direction of the region, providing community groups, civic associations, NGOs, and the private sector with access to information about the metropolitan region. Because of its systematic approach and the inclusion of actors from various levels of government and civil society, the CDS has been used to direct both local and national spending, foster pro-poor policies, reinforce the decentralisation process, and institutionalise the approach as a good governance practice. A number of partners are supporting Tetouan, including USAID, UN-HABITAT, the International Network for Urban Development, the Arab Media Forum for Environment and Development, the Near East and North Africa Region (NENA) Urban Forum, and the Morocco Urban Forum.

Presenting Tetouan's CDS experience at a workshop sponsored by the Cities Alliance during the recent Founding Congress of UCLG, Rachid Talbi, minister of trade, industry, and telecommunications and president of the urban commune of Tetouan in 2003, emphasised the positive impacts of the CDS and the importance of the participatory approach in developing it. Involving the various stakeholders has leveraged nonstate resources and investments, promoted policy reforms at the local level, and identified necessary actions at the national level. Engaging stakeholders and including the urban poor from the beginning in planning the CDS has proven crucial for successful implementation.
