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[Bridging the Urban Divide in the ESCWA Region: Towards Inclusive
Cities]

Unbalanced National Growth and the Challenge of Inclusive Development

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Introduction

Background:

- More than half the world population live in cities.
- Main feature of this urban growth: radicalization of urban inequalities, also termed “the urban divide”. On a spatial level, the urban divide manifests itself through fragmented spaces dividing spaces of the rich from spaces of poor, i.e. socio-spatial segregation and urban exclusion.
- Urban inequalities negatively affect the practice of cities as spaces of opportunities, flows and movement, and the experiences of social diversity. The fear of the ‘other’ is reinforced and cities become planned according to security/surveillance needs, leading to increased socio-spatial segregation and urban exclusion.

Question & Hypotheses :

- Main question for urban policy-makers : How to redress these urban inequalities? How to bridge the urban divide?
- Recommendations promote the idea of inclusive development, through the implementation of social, spatial, political and economically inclusive policies, that seek to regionally balance development, i.e. development policies and investments target “lagging” areas, trying to level them with “leading” areas.
- The 2009 WDR “Reshaping Economic Geography” argues against this approach and advocates instead economic integration through spatially-blind policies that favor interaction between leading and lagging areas, using: 1) connective infrastructure, 2) institutions linking places, and 3) interventions targeting economic linkages (WDR 2009: xxiii).

Proposed Framework :

- Build on the WDR approach of economic integration and link economically leading and lagging areas, BUT also ground development policies socially, spatially and environmentally aiming for regionally balanced development (but not through equal investments).
- Advocate a stronger and more central role to the State in the development equation, AND propose public policies with a welfare function that can structurally redress socio-economic inequalities, especially amongst the poor segments of society, for instance through redistribution.

Methodology & Outline:

- Methodology: analysis of available studies and data
- Outline:
 - 1) Assessment of urbanization trends and development dynamics;
 - 2) Synthesis of national policies promoting inclusive spatial development;
 - 3) Overview of policy implementation challenges and opportunities;
 - 4) Recommendations for addressing urban inequalities.

1. Urbanization and Development Dynamics: A Regional Overview

1.1. Urbanization Trends

- Almost all countries in Western Asia will be more than 50% urbanized by 2030
- Future urban population growth rates will be strongly associated to natural growth.
- Note the importance of migration flows and forced displacements (cf. geopolitical context & uncertain financial environments).
- Urban growth is a positive force for economic development, and can contribute to the eradication of poverty, IF coupled with efficient distributive policies and strategic urban planning providing low-income groups (including refugees) with affordable housing and access to basic services.
- Often it's not, and hence it leads to increased concentration of poor people inside and outside cities (expansion of suburbs, slums), generating heightened levels of socio-economic and urban inequalities.

1.2. Regional and Country Disparities

- Consequences of urban growth vary across countries based on income and human development levels. Three groups can be discerned, the first being differentiated within the ESCWA region by its high-income :

i) Oil-rich countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE): urban inequalities are made invisible in cities (namely through highways and infrastructure), producing high levels of socio-spatial exclusion.

ii) Middle-income countries (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria): urban inequalities are well differentiated amongst urban/rural regions and amongst primary/secondary cities; within urban areas, cities and suburbs are socio-spatially segregated, and within cities, neighborhoods can also be socio-spatially segregated.

iii) Lower-income countries (Sudan, Yemen): urban-rural inequalities are the most salient, as well as socio-spatial segregation within cities' neighborhoods.

1.3. Economic and Spatial Linkages

- Significant potentials for economic and spatial linkages but insufficiently developed, and seriously hampered by the occupation of Palestine by Israel in 1948.
- **Economic and spatial linkages matter because:**
 - > Connective infrastructure positively contributes to **economic interdependence** amongst cities, where specific areas specialize in different functions that have strong interrelationships with other areas/functions (WDR 2009: 199).
 - > Relationships between transport costs and scale economies are conducive to **high trade flows** and can contribute, when effective, to better economic growth (WDR 2009: 170-3).
- Note that **facilitating mobility** means opening up borders and encouraging the circulation of people, resources and goods, by minimizing control procedures and conditions of access.

2. Assessing National Policies Promoting Inclusive Spatial Development

2.1. Analytical Framework

- For WDR 2009, economic growth is bound to be unbalanced; policies should not attempt to spread out economic activities, as development can still be inclusive if wealth becomes concentrated in few places given people can move towards them (WDR 2009: xxi).
- Economic integration deals with three dimensions of development:
 - i) density (local urbanization)
 - ii) distance (national territorial development)
 - iii) division (international integration).
- WDR 2009 advocates higher local densities (promoting economic growth in selected cities and urban regions), shorter distances (through connective infrastructure) and lower divisions (for accessing global and regional markets).

- **Policies are elaborated based on 2 levels of classification:**
1st Classification according to economic geography of lagging areas:
 - A) countries with sparsely populated lagging areas,
 - B) countries with densely populated lagging areas,
 - C) divided countries with densely populated lagging areas.
- For the (C) group (the most complex, in which many ESCWA countries fall), **policies for better economic integration should prioritize:**
 - Institutions that promote fluid land and labour markets, security, education and health programs, safe water and sanitation;
 - Interregional transport infrastructure; information and communication services;
 - Incentives to agriculture and agro-based industry, irrigation systems, workforce training and local roads (which should be geographically focused, in special economic zones for instance).

- **Policies to facilitate inclusive development according to the 2nd level of classification based on the country's urbanization:**

- i) incipient urbanization** (less than 25%: Yemen, Sudan, Egypt):

- build density, by establishing institutions that address land rights (secure land tenure and property rights);
 - provide basic and social services, as well as water and sanitation;
 - macro-economic policies should not favour one productive activity over the other, and remain neutral and spatially-blind.

- ii) intermediate urbanization** (about 50%: Syria, Iraq, Oman, Palestine):

- build density, reduce distance, by establishing institutions that regulate land use and insure universal provision of basic and social services;
 - develop transport infrastructure to enhance connectivity within and between cities;
 - work with firms on socially efficient location decisions.

- **iii) advanced urbanization** (more than 75%: Jordan, KSA, UAE, Lebanon, Bahrein, Qatar, Kuwait):
 - focus on land taxation, in addition to land regulations and rights and maintaining universal provision of basic and social services;
 - invest in transport infrastructure and demand management;
 - focus on targeted interventions such as slum area development, and programs to reduce crime and environmental degradation.
- **But, major challenges of which:**
 - > re: higher local densities: inability of states to elaborate and implement spatial policies that favour certain provinces at the expense of others, because of potential social conflict, even if it makes sense economically;
 - > re: shorter distances: peoples' and resources' mobility and accessibility are not easily facilitated due to insecurity and latent or active conflicts;
 - > re: lower divisions: access to global and regional markets requires power, prestige, competences and know-how that are not readily available in many cities and urban regions, in addition to constraints put by first world countries that restrict possibilities for entry into these markets.

2.2. How Well-Integrated are Spatial Planning and Development Policies in ESCWA?

2.2.1. General Features & Proposed Assessment Framework :

> Spatial planning & development policies main features:

- i) Combination of laissez-faire attitude and interventionist approach:**
states are urban planners and spatial developers in central areas where their powers are the most visible, and let go of their interventionist agendas in more marginalized and peripheral areas that are left to develop by themselves.

- ii) Domineering neo-liberal economic agenda yielding fragmentary and uncoordinated urban planning initiatives,** led by market-hungry private developers and entrepreneurs, inoperative local governments, active but resource-less civil society groups, and prolific international donors and organizations.

- **However (or despite this), most ESCWA's countries are currently leading major national spatial development and urban planning policies.**

And our preliminary review shows they are characterized by:

> shift from master and physical planning approaches to what seems to be more strategic planning approaches; reliance on international expertise.

> grounding in paradigms of **economic growth and development**, without strong spatial dimensions (named 'visions', 'agendas', these policies are reports without maps that advocate generic programs favouring investment planning, seeking the creation of job opportunities, reducing poverty, and promoting global competitiveness).

- With this framework in mind, we assess the national development and spatial planning policies elaborated by the ESCWA's countries according to the following **four elements**:
 - i) The integration of economic components within a **spatial analysis** (using mapping analysis and spatial planning tools);
 - ii) The integration of the **economic agenda with spatial, social and environmental** components;
 - iii) The place of **social inclusion and balanced development** policies in the proposed national strategy;
 - iv) The **political will and institutional setup** responsible for leading and implementing the national strategy.

- **Summary Notes:**

- > Policies are predominantly economic in nature, and not grounded in spatial planning analysis (except for Lebanon & KSA?);
 - > Social development is not accounted for in an integrated manner (often appears as a corollary, cf. Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the UAE, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain);
 - > No substantive environmental and ecological management strategies;
 - > No urban policies regarding slums and refugee camps;
 - > No spatial analysis tools.
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- > But some interesting approaches for integrated development:
 - **KSA:** development of economic cities and spatial corridors seeking to balance development regionally;
 - **Syria:** project of reorganizing the informal economy sector;
 - **Palestine:** focus on affordable housing in association with municipal stakeholders and land authorities;
 - **Lebanon:** integrated spatial planning approach to territorial development.

An Assessment of Spatial Planning and Development Policies in Selected ESCWA Countries: Summary Table

	Spatial Analysis	Economic, Spatial, Social and Environmental Integration	Social Inclusion and Balanced Development	Political Will and Institutional Setup
Lebanon	yes	yes	not fully	no
Palestine	no	yes	yes	cannot be insured
Jordan	no	no, only economic development	not fully	yes
Syria	no	not fully	not fully	yes
Egypt	no	no, only economic development	no	yes
KSA	no?	yes	yes	yes
Oman	no	not fully	not fully	yes
Qatar	no	not clearly	no	yes
Bahrain	no	not fully	no	yes
UAE	no	no	no	yes

- **2.3. Social Inclusion in National Development Policies: Serious Shortcomings and Minor Successes**

> Spatial development and investment policies in the ESCWA region focus mostly on trade and services sectors **privileging the (already privileged) middle and high-end ranges of the population**, rather than productive sectors and social policy fields.

> **Very few initiatives focus on social inclusion as means for incorporating poor and excluded categories of residents (and not only nationals) in the social and economic cycle of spatial areas**, by providing them the means to access adequate housing and basic social and infrastructural services as well as access to sustainable job opportunities.

> **Some noteworthy initiatives :**

- Building of new cities; or investments in secondary cities (Egypt, KSA)
- Land use planning and connective infrastructure (Lebanon, KSA)
- Slum policies (KSA, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan)
- Housing policies (Palestine, KSA, Jordan, Bahrein)

3. Policy Implementation: Challenges and Recommendations

3.1 Spatial Planning Recommendations

Rationale: Inequalities will not be resolved through criminalizing poverty and containing the poor in isolated and stigmatized neighbourhoods, or in jails, but through the reconstruction of a **welfare state** (Wacquant 1996).

> **Five Levels of Recommendations:**

- **i) Institutional:** Governments should take up at a central level the responsibility of leading and implementing national-scale spatial planning strategies, by an autonomous public institution.
 - > Spatial planning needs to be conceived by a multidisciplinary team of trained professionals privileging a holistic and integrated approach to balanced development, giving priority to the idea of rights to access spatial opportunities.
 - > To insure consensus, participatory processes are key. Outputs could include the adoption of human rights charters or city statutes (cf. Brazil City Statute).

- **ii) Governance:** Public planning institutions should operate effectively to circumvent bureaucratic and red tape barriers.
 - > Should be as shielded as possible from the interference of political and business interests.
 - > Should also be responsible for the revision of existing planning legislations in ways to do planning for what is, not for what should be.
- **iii) Decentralization:** devolution of urban planning functions to regional and local stakeholders (such as federations of municipalities);
 - > should rethink the geographic boundaries of spatial areas and their relationships to each other
 - > should develop a public database of urban and spatial indicators to better understand the built and unbuilt environments and conceive of interventions to improve its economic, social and environmental integration.

- **iv) Planning Approach:** responsive to residents' lifestyles (irrespective of normative ideals), built on their competences and know-how, facilitating access to basic services, improved infrastructure, transportation networks and job opportunities.
 - > Planning should be less about physical embellishment and construction projects and more about integrated multidisciplinary approaches that work holistically (financial and soft loan schemes, infrastructure upgrading, service provision, building materials, public space schemes, vocational training, capacity-building, empowerment....)
- **v) Planning Education:** Train public sector people across policy sectors and levels what is integrated spatial planning and how spatial planning tools can be integrated to rethinking development according to a rights-based approach promoting socio-spatial inclusion.
 - > should work closely with universities and incorporate such approaches into their curricular structure, as to form future professionals able to disseminate this knowledge more effectively.

- **3.2 Inclusive Development Recommendations**

> Combine two sets of policies:

a) Balanced regional development (by reinforcing existing urban centers, creating new urban nodes or special economic zones, establishing developmental projects, etc.); and/or

b) Creating/reinforcing access and mobility of people to existing leading/central urban areas (through connective infrastructure, economic incentives, area approaches, etc.).

> Based on the below sequence:

1) **Initiate a thorough assessment of spatial and land use configuration**, highlighting **connections and linkages between its spatial areas**, as well as the main characteristics of each spatial area (economic, socio-cultural and environmental) and how the territory fares with respect to local density, national distance, and international division (WDR 2009).

2) **Propose a spatial vision through which to achieve balanced growth and inclusive development**, based on a participatory process. Identify profiles of 'losers' and 'winners' for each planning scenario, and extents of losses and gains, for making informed decisions accordingly.

3) **Elaborate scenarios promoting inclusive development through varied approaches** (cf. 2009 WDR summary table for economic integration)

4) **Adoption of an inclusive development strategy**, as the start of a process through which implementation is managed and evaluated.

> Economic Integration Policies (WDR 2009): Summary Table

I. Through Urbanization Policies [Enhancing Local Density]		
<i>in rural settings: (less than 25% urban)</i>	<i>in settings with rapid urbanization: (about 50% urban)</i>	<i>in places with advanced urbanization: (more than 75% urban)</i>
establish institutions to promote urbanization; develop land policies and basic services	reinforce institutions and put in place connective infrastructure	keep working on institutions and infrastructure; initiate targeted developments to deal with slums (preconditions are land institutions, effective basic services, and transport infrastructure)
II. Through Territorial Development Policies [Shortening National Distances]		
> start by identify lagging areas and where poor people live (not always overlapping)		
<i>in sparsely populated lagging areas:</i>	<i>in densely populated lagging areas, with homogeneity of language:</i>	<i>in densely populated lagging areas, with strong differences of language and culture:</i>
provide basic and social services, encourage mobility of people, promote land institutions	encourage mobility of people, enabling access to dynamic markets, promote connective infrastructure and institutions	promote infrastructure and institutions, propose carefully designed incentives to producers to invest (especially to agriculture and allied activities)
III. Through Regional Integration [Bridging International Divisions]		
<i>in countries close to world markets:</i>	<i>in countries distant from world markets, but with large home markets:</i>	<i>in countries distant from world markets and within divided regions:</i>
focus on institutions that can establish connections to large markets	focus on institutions and regional infrastructure; expand home markets and make them more specialized	establish institutions that thin borders, regional infrastructure that connects countries; propose conditional incentives

In Conclusion:

To address the challenge of urban inequalities and promote inclusive development in the ESCWA region, we need:

- > a flexible rights-based approach to inclusive development;**
- > a long-term national spatial strategy, inspired from the economic integration perspective advocated in the 2009 WDR, but re-adapted in a way to incorporate social, spatial and environmental components;**
- > centrally piloted and reinforced autonomous public planning authorities, operating in a decentralized and participatory manner.**