

Launch of the Urbanization Platform (UkP) in the MENA region
Center for Mediterranean Integration, Marseille, September 17-18, 2012
Press Release

The Urbanization Knowledge Platform (UkP) in the MENA region was officially launched at the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) on September 17-18, 2012. The World Bank, in partnership with the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) and the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI), brought together representatives from national governments, mayors, practitioners, research institutions and academics in the field of urban development from Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia.

The objective of the workshop was to provide a platform for government and decision makers in the Arab world to discuss urbanization issues and brainstorm solutions for sustainable urban development. During the workshop the participants discussed and shared ideas on the following three themes: (i) Empowering local governments financially, administratively and technically; (ii) Strengthening cities for economic growth, job creation and sustainable provision of services for all; (iii) Creating accountable and inclusive cities and towns.

The above themes were highlighted in the keynote speech made by H.E. Fathallah Oualalou, Mayor of Rabat, where he stated: « Managing urbanization to reduce urban land prices and promoting social cohesion is as important as taking into consideration the emergence of new mandates such as environment, knowledge management and culture. Therefore we need to develop a true economic management of public goods going beyond private interest. Why not use this new MENA urbanization platform to brainstorm and bring forward the agenda of Mediterranean mayors/cities? ».

Mr. Franck Bousquet, Sector Manager of the Urban and Social Development Unit, MENA at the World Bank indicated that « the objective of this Urbanization platform is to connect MENA city mayors, researchers and policy makers to promote evidence-based urban public policies and create a peer to peer network to share international experiences and learn from successful practices. » Based on the feedback of the participants, several topics relevant to the MENA region were identified by city mayors such as -- how to make cities more inclusive; how to promote social participation in the urban planning processes; how to clarify mandates and flow of funds between national and local governments; and how to improve provision of local services such as solid waste, housing and urban transportation.

The seminar was highly interactive and new ideas emerged on a number of practices and specific themes. Dr. Ahmed Al Salloum, Director of AUDI, welcomed the partnership with AUDI as it represents the scientific and technical arm of the Arab Towns Organization. He emphasized the importance of the workshop and its tremendous value of bringing knowledge closer to policy makers.

Finally, in his concluding statement, Mats Karlsson, Director of CMI, thanked all the participants and welcomed the beginning of a new partnership which brings together various organizations under a common umbrella to address urban development challenges in the MENA region. He committed the CMI resources and efforts towards the advancement of the UkP in the region.