

The Role of Technology

Implementing the New Urban Agenda to Achieve Sustainable Development

DIALOGUE SESSION 2:

Technology as Means of Implementation in the Arab Region: Network 11 Initiative

United Nations Headquarters, New York
Conference Room 2
20 June 2018 / 12.30 PM

Talking Points

Dr. Talal Abu Ghazaleh

Chairman, TAGOrg and Hon. Chairman, CSU Executive Council
(Second Session)

Distinguished Delegates and Participants,

Before inviting my friend, Professor Lance Jay Brown, to moderate this Dialogue session with Dr. Zena Ali Ahmed, the Director of the UN-Habitat Office for the Arab Region, on how to address the challenges of urbanization in the Arab world, let me say a few words by way of framing the issues facing our region.

The Arab region is urbanizing more rapidly than any other region in the world except Sub-Saharan Africa, with an annual urbanization rate of over 4 percent over the last two decades .

Already, more than 60 percent of the population lives in cities. In the East, the proportion of urban population ranges from 43 percent in Egypt to 87 percent in Lebanon. The GCC countries are mostly urban. Iraq, Jordan and Palestine are urbanizing rapidly and so are Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania in the West.

A second striking feature of the region is its high rate of population growth resulting in the youngest population in the world. Almost two thirds of its people are below 29 years of age. A third challenge facing many countries in the region is the large and growing number of refugees and internally displaced persons crowding into camp cities around urban centers competing for scarce resources, services and jobs with local inhabitants.

Together, these trends present great challenges to national governments and local authorities of managing evermore youthful and crowded cities. There are growing pressures on inadequate and crumbling infrastructures, weak education and health services and few job opportunities. Slums and informal settlement result from and add to these pressures.

Yet, the youth bulge also represents a great opportunity for countries of the region to reap a growth dividend as the Asian Tigers did in the 1960s and 70s. We should not forget that no industrial country developed without high population growth and rapid urbanization in the early phase of industrialization.

The question is how to transform tough challenges into captured opportunities for accelerating inclusive and sustainable growth that creates decent jobs and better services for all citizens and especially for the young, women and other vulnerable groups.

I firmly believe that nurturing and harnessing the digital revolution, including new and emerging technologies, offers the best and perhaps the only way forward for the countries and cities of the region to meet the challenges posed by rapid urbanization and a growing youthful population. That is why TAGOrg has committed itself to support digital development, through education and training throughout the Arab region.

A great part of the answer lies in learning from each other and from other regions by building powerful networks and platforms for collaboration among all stakeholders that can deliver results on a scale that matches the needs.

Network 11 launched two years ago under ECOSOC auspices is one such platform for knowledge-sharing and multi-stakeholder collaboration to advance SDG 11 and implement the New Urban Agenda.

I am now pleased to invite our Moderator, Professor Lance Brown to take over now and initiate the dialogue with Dr. Zena Ali Ahmed on how Network 11 can serve as a springboard for smart and sustainable urbanization in the Arab region.