

# **WDR 2009/Consultations**

## **Middle East North Africa**

Marseilles (France) May 5-6, 2008

### **Summary Report**

This summary report gives the general thrust and conclusions of the consultation with the MENA region for the World Development Report 2009 (WDR 2009) focusing on spatial disparities that was organized in Marseilles on May 5-6, 2008. This consultation gave the opportunity to present and discuss two related topics: the elaboration of the World Bank urban strategy on the one hand; and a study of spatial disparities in the MENA region on the other hand.

This summary report addresses briefly the context and format of the consultation and the main outcomes of the discussions. These will be expanded in a more detailed report, including the program, the list of participants, notes taken by the rapporteurs and the conclusions drawn by the Chair of the workshop.

Furthermore, the PPT presentations, video interviews of selected participants, and other related documentation, will be posted in the authorized section (limited to staff and participants) of the internet website [www.euromedina.org](http://www.euromedina.org) (website of the network of Mediterranean cities, managed by KNA MENA).

### **The format of the consultation**

The consultation was organized by the World Bank Agency in Marseilles (WBI KNA MENA) at the request, and with the support, of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGCID) in service of the WDR unit (Office of the World Bank Chief Economist).

The consultation held in Marseilles was part of the worldwide consultations conducted by the WDR team in the context of the preparation of the WDR 2009, and followed the consultations conducted in Africa. In keeping with the latter, representatives from the African networks of cities (notably UCLG Africa and PDM) were invited to attend the Marseilles consultation which focused on the MENA region.

The consultation workshop was attended by 45 participants, including 13 from the MENA region, most notably local elected officials, representatives of ministries and central governments and other policy makers as well as experts. Were also present representatives from the Africa region and international experts, first among whom Mrs. Frannie Léautier, former Vice-President of the World Bank in charge of the World Bank Institute (WBI) who chaired the consultation workshop.

The participants represented a wide array of countries including: Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Tunisia. Last minute obligations prevented participants from Iraq, Jordan and Yemen to participate in the consultations.

The consultation welcomed observers from the World Bank (WDR, MNA, SD/Urban anchor), from French ministries and institutions (MOFA, MEEDAT, AFD, City of Marseilles), and from other international organizations (UNEP/Plan Bleu, Medcities network).

The presentations and discussions were conducted in French and English with a simultaneous translation. The written material was in both French and English and the power point presentations were also shown in the two languages. The participants had been granted access to a reserved section on the internet website (as indicated above) and were given before the opening files comprising all relevant material and a USB stick. Complementary material was handed over at the entrance of the consultation room.

The debates extended over two full days (refer to program) and were divided in four sessions of approximately two hours. The participants were seated around a U-format table and were given all access to the discussions. The observers were sitting behind and had limited access to the floor. The scheduled agenda was fully respected and led to enriching comments and debates.

## **Main conclusions**

Participants agreed that the WDR 2009 constitutes a remarkable work, proposing an analytical framework of great elegance, in taking as starting point the fact that urban concentration is unavoidable.

Urban concentration is influenced by three parameters: Density linked to the human factor, Distance linked to the geographical factor and Division linked to the political factor. This three D scheme applies within countries as well as within sets of countries throughout the world. Policies should deal with issues engendered by those three parameters, and the principles of action remain the same whatever the level of territory being considered. Solving density problems implies to create good institutional conditions and policy measures should be neutral whatever the nature of territories; solving the problems created by distance implies to develop infrastructure, of (tele)communications notably; solving problems generated by division implies to invest in human resources and social services with efficient incentives. Thus the principles of action can be summarized as “one I for one D”, and more complex are the situations (more Ds are concerned), more Is are needed. This approach seems all the more justified that history shows that income levels tend to converge among territories in the long term, even if gaps increase at the beginning between most dynamic territories and others.

This scheme, however, appeared to the workshop participants too simplifying and applied too systematically throughout the report:

- there is a need to use the scheme with more nuances in taking in account the great diversity of local situations and their specificities;
- there is a need to question the relevance of economic “laws” on which it is based, and which tend to generalize a growth model which has worked so far only in the West and Northern Asia; it might be fundamentally ill-adapted to the developing world, affected by a strong demographic increase (due to the lowering of mortality) and victim of difficult transitions characterized by the growth of slums; this model is also put in question by major breaking trends generated by the new technologies (ICT) in one hand and climate change in the other;
- with this in view there is a need to deepen the analysis of urban concentration from the viewpoint of sustainable development, as well as the viewpoint of resilience capabilities vis-à-vis systemic global risks as illustrated by the food crisis;
- at any rate, there is a need to emphasize more in the policy orientations proposed by the report the followings: decentralization (and power de-concentration which should go with it); the development of small and medium-size cities; and integrated approaches acting on the multiple parameters that condition territorial and local development (infrastructure, finance, governance, technology, education....).

The peculiar problems that the MNA region is facing have been abundantly discussed;

- the need to pursue further in depth reforms related to governance, education and so on that condition implementation and success of territorial policies;
- the diversity of countries’ situations, induced by differences in resources’ endowments (oil), geopolitical and political conditions (conflicts), socio-cultural foundations (women’s status), etc.;
- the lack of trade integration, on which progress is necessary among MNA countries as well as between MNA and the neighboring regions (Europe, Asia,...).

More generally, it was emphasized that the central issue for MNA is not so much to encourage the urbanization process in managing its undesirable effects, as the report seems to postulate it in general. But it is indeed to cope with the major problems generated by a rapid and somewhat anarchic urbanization, and to put in place efficient policies to reduce it by the development of small and medium sized cities, among other things.

These questions would be revisited during the WDR dissemination events in the region, as well with the preparation of a report addressing specifically territorial disparities within the region. Another opportunity will be given by the elaboration of the World Bank urban development strategy. Finally, the next WDR will examine implications of climate change and will consider MNA specific issues in this perspective.