

Future Saudi Arabia Cities Programme Programme Brief

Background and context

Cities in Saudi Arabia have grown at a pace that has exceeded the capacity of administrative and planning authorities to keep up with it. Conventional urban planning has proven to be ineffective in managing urban growth and preventing environmental degradation, shrinking public spaces, the formation of informal settlements, as well as transport and urban mobility failures, among other aspects.

Rapid urbanization is occurring across the country. The total number of urban centers has increased from 58 cities in 1963 to 258 cities currently, meaning that the number of urban centers has more than quadrupled within a period of 30 years. This calls for an urgent need to address the negative externalities and imbalances of urban growth and maximize the benefits of urbanization through balanced territorial development. Sustainable urban development practices will also require larger room and mechanisms for all residents to participate in what matters to them in the city.

Saudi Arabia aims to take its cities to a level of sustainable urbanization that addresses these factors. The request for support comes at a critical time in the region politically, economically and socially—with recognition that participatory planning methods are necessary for more equitable development, both between Saudi Arabia’s cities and within them.

By utilizing UN-Habitat’s principles of sustainable urbanization and the City Prosperity Index as entry-points, Saudi cities will be capacitated to look at their cities, and address urban development, in a more inclusive and multi-dimensional way.

Programme strategy

As a result of the growing significance of cities in Saudi Arabia, an agreement has been developed between the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat) for the implementation of a technical cooperation programme entitled *Future Saudi Cities Programme*.

The Programme is based on analytical research to measure the commitment of different cities in the implementation of national and local policies and strategies and the feasibility of such policies and strategies. It also focuses on the capacities of local administrative and institutional bodies and

development partners for the implementation of these policies and strategies. This includes discussions with various development partners and interest groups for the reformulation of a new planning vision in Saudi Arabia that is based on accurate diagnosis of all challenges facing cities and exploring the optimal urban pattern to enable cities to compete, attract investments, open new horizons for skill development, innovation and restoration and promotes public participation.

The *Future Saudi Arabia Cities Programme* that will contribute to more sustainable urbanization in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It will contribute to a shift in how urban development is perceived and addressed in the country by promoting a new urban agenda. The goal is ultimately to achieve future cities that are able to achieve balance between the three basic objectives: quality of life, economic competitiveness and environmental protection.

The 17 participating Programme cities have been selected based on different population sizes, range of capacities and economic potential, and will benefit and learn from each other. The selection is also in light of the Kingdom's strive for a more balanced territorial development between cities.

Some of the key strategies that the Programme will use to promote sustainable urban development in Saudi Arabia are:

- Increasing evidence-based and multi-dimensional analysis of cities using the City Prosperity Index.
- Addressing urban sprawl and urban expansion in an informed and planned manner.
- Understanding and providing recommendations on the legislative and institutional context necessary for proposed changes in how urban development is addressed.
- Strengthening institutional relations between Ministries and partners engaged in the urban sector.
- Assessing capacity gaps and developing tailor-made capacity for stakeholders involved.
- Engaging and integrating the needs of all residents, and in particular youth and women's needs as part of urban plans.
- Enhancing public awareness in the Kingdom on the notion of prosperous cities and sustainable urbanization.
- Creating forums for engagement on Saudi urban development issues both in the country and internationally.
- Supporting structures to sustain new planning practices beyond the programme through better coordination, engaging national training institutions, creating of a Saudi Youth and Women's Sustainable Urbanization Networks, and establishing monitoring functions.

Potentially, a National Urban Policy may be developed during the programme period, if the sufficient level of synergy is reached. This would be a strong indication of having achieved the programme results.

Key partners

The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs is the main implementing partner through direct execution of key programme components.

Other critical partners include:

- Ministry of Economics and Planning
- Ministry of Finance
- Arab Urban Development Institute

As part of the Programme, two Networks to enhance engagement and integration of women's and youth interests will also be formed.

Programme objectives and expected accomplishments

The Programme goal is:

To develop a new vision and a strategic planning framework for a sustainable urban future in Saudi Arabia that is following international standards and is acceptable to national and local partners

The Programme directly supports two UN Strategic Framework objectives in Saudi Arabia:

OUTCOME 5.2: By 2016, capacity is enhanced to engage in global dialogues, fora and knowledge exchanges.

OUTCOME 1.2: By 2016, national capacities for effective evidence-based policy making enhanced towards socially inclusive development results

The Programme has four expected accomplishments:

1. Better informed and inclusive policies and programmes on sustainable urbanization at the local, national and regional levels
2. Improved laws and regulations for decentralized and coordinated city-level urban strategic plans and projects
3. Enhanced individual and institutional capacities for managing sustainable urbanization nationally, regionally and locally
4. Strengthened partnership and exchange on Saudi urbanization process

Participating cities

	Region	City	Pop. size		Region	City	Pop. size
1	Riyadh	Riyadh city		10	Aseer	Khamies mashiet	
2	Mekka	Mekka city		11	Najran	Najran	
3	Mekka	Jeddah city		12	Jizan	Jizan	
4	Mekka	Taif city		13	Haiel	Haiel	
5	Medina	Medina city		14	Shamaliya	Araar	
6	Tabuk	Tabuk city		15	Bahaa	Albahaa	
7	Sharkiya	Damam city		16	Qaseem	Brieda-eniza city	
8	Sharkiya	Ihsa city		17	Al Gouf	Sakaka	
9	Sharkiya	Katief city					

For more information

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