



**ECOSOC • Integration Segment (27–29 May, 2014)**  
**SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION**

**BUILDING  
THE FUTURE**  
**we WANT**

# **JAPAN**

## **Contribution to the 2014 United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Integration Segment**

**2014 ECOSOC Integration Segment: Sustainable Urbanization**  
**Japan's Reply to the Questions by Vice-President of ECOSOC**

*Q1 What has been the experience of your country in using urbanization as a tool for the integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development?*

(Answer)

**Urbanisation in Japan**

Japan experienced a progressive urbanisation throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1950, the share of urban population based on "World Urbanization Prospects<sup>1</sup>" by the UN already amounted to 53.4%. Due to the continuous rural-urban migration in the latter half of the century, urban population reached 78.6 % in 2000.

The period of the high economic growth in Japan accompanied the rapid urbanisation, despite its positive and negative effects. National development planning, as well as urban policy, has thus long been addressing urbanisation challenges, by integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

*Q2 How have you addressed specific urbanization challenges in an integrated way?*

(Answer)

**National Development Plans seeking for a harmonised development**

In order to address challenges arising from urbanisation and growing urban-rural gaps in an integrated way, Comprehensive National Development Plans for 10 to 20 years had been conceived. In total, five long term development plans were published during 1962-1998, the goal of which remained a “harmonised development” throughout the period.

The Comprehensive National Development Plans had addressed a wide range of problems that were brought about by the massive demographic flows by defining measures to reduce geographical concentration in metropolitan areas, to locate diverse functions in outside metropolitan areas and to support rural areas facing significant depopulation and ageing. In regard to industrial investments in regions, a variety of special development areas were designated so as to adapt to the purpose and priorities of the individual plans.

Since 2005, the National Spatial Strategy Law has however replaced the Comprehensive National Development Act. The new law has come to place more importance on the aspects of sustainable use and conservation of land than new development projects.

---

<sup>1</sup> 2011 Revision

Q3 *What kinds of investments have been made in your cities to make them hubs of sustainability?*

(Answer)

### **Metropolitan regions and sub-centres**

Development plans for the three metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya were formulated as well by reflecting the principles defined in the Comprehensive National Development Plan. In Tokyo metropolitan area, development of surrounding hub cities were also undertaken. Government offices, research centres and universities located at the centre of Tokyo have been relocated to the sub-centre cities in the suburban areas of the Tokyo capital region, which has contributed to reducing over-concentration in the centre of the capital. Since the late 1980s, relocation of 76 organisations has been planned, 92% of which were completed. Thanks to the relocation, 180 hundred officials have been distributed to outside Tokyo, while 35 ha. has been made available for new use.

Q4 *What kinds of institutional structures are in place in your country for effective governance, policy-making and planning for sustainable urbanization?*

(Answer)

### **Planning system as an effective governance mechanism**

In order to promote an integrated and coordinated approach toward sustainable development at national level, a national spatial strategy as well as four Comprehensive National Development Plans was formulated by involving all the relevant national ministries. Priorities of local governments can be well reflected to the national policies in the process of planning by holding hearings from prefectures, relevant municipalities and so on.

### **Regional Planning system involving wide range of stakeholders**

Based on the national plans, regional plans are formulated as well by organising eight regional councils, each one of which consists of the relevant prefectural governments and other stakeholders as well as national authorities. Proposals by the municipalities are also well examined in the planning process.

Spatial planning process in Japan has contributed to effective policy-making and governance for sustainable urbanisation.

Q5 *What are some innovations and partnerships that demonstrate the power of urbanization in the integration of three dimensions of sustainable development in your country?*

(Answer)

**Partnership-approach involving locally based non-profit organisations**

In regard to innovation and partnerships, the National Spatial Strategy published in 2008 highlights partnership-based approach initiated by a variety of stakeholders, in particular, locally based non-profits. Inclusive approach is increasingly focused on in planning and policy making process regarding regional development.