

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Yangon, Myanmar 11<sup>th</sup> September 2012 : The Urban Research and Development Institute (URDI) launches first training on 'Sustainable Land Management in the Urban Context'**

The Department of Human Settlements and Housing Development (DHSHD) of the Ministry of Construction and UN-Habitat in Myanmar launched yesterday the first training on urban land issues at the Urban Research and Development Institute (URDI) in Yangon. URDI is a collaboration between the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and UN-Habitat in the field of urban development, with a view to making the urban sector all inclusive, environmentally sustainable and complementary to rural development. URDI initiatives are supported by the Government of Norway.

The training, *'Sustainable Land Management in the Urban Context'* is the first one on the thematic area of land management and is intended to build state and municipal government capacities to make informed decisions on land issues being faced by the rapidly growing cities and urban centers of Myanmar today.

Thirty participants from the General Administration Department (GAD) of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Department of Rural Development (DRD) from all States and Regions as well as Yangon and Mandalay City Development Committees (YCDC, MCDC), are participating in this 6 day training led by National Advisors from Myanmar in partnership with International Advisors from UN-Habitat. At the end of the training, participants will have an increased awareness of broader issues and pressures related to urbanization and its impact on land. Topics and discussions range from urbanization trends and growth corridors, the impact of economic development and urbanization on urban land, land use conversion, densification, physical expansion and peri-urban expansion, planning instruments and land use planning tools, land administration, to infrastructure investment planning. Participants will also go on a field visit to an industrial site and unplanned settlements in Yangon.

The Deputy Director General of DHSHD, U Khin Sein delivered opening remarks on behalf of the new Union Minister for Construction, U Kyaw Lwin, who had returned from the Sixth World Urban Forum held in Naples, Italy in time for swearing in ceremonies in Nay Pyi Taw .

*U Khin Sein stated "Myanmar, with the installation of reform strategy in political and economic regimes, is on the road to modernization and development. The anticipated rapid economic development will accelerate urbanization and increase the size of the cities and urban centres putting additional burden on existing urban infrastructure and services...Experience from other countries indicates that there may be undesirable pattern of urban growth for the whole society in the long run if there are weaknesses in decision-making by urban authorities during urbanization and urban development process....socio-economic problems of growing cities will definitely become future challenges for the country as a whole."*

Being in the region of large economies like China and India, Myanmar will come under the influence of regional economic development. Given the growth potential of Myanmar, existing cities will grow bigger, a few towns will lose their importance, many existing towns will expand and new ones will emerge. This transformation will bring immense benefit to Myanmar if we take early and far seeing steps to manage and plan urbanization. As Myanmar develops a decentralized system of governance, the challenges and opportunities for balanced socio-economic development remain huge.



Participant's brainstorming during Group exercise session, presentations by States and Divisions. Photos by UN-Habitat MYA.

In his opening speech, the Country Programme Manager of UN-Habitat, Mr. Bijay Karmacharya, stated *“One of the urgent priorities for Myanmar today is the management of a vital natural resource: Land. Economic growth will inevitably be accompanied by rapid urbanization which will impose huge pressures on land. This pressure on land needs to be managed in a balanced manner with consideration to a multitude of factors ranging from infrastructure development, environmental and cultural preservation, risk-sensitive land use and human settlements planning. Land management needs to be viewed not only from a physical and structural point of view but also from a socio-economic point of view.”*

The Urban Research and Development Institute (URDI) was set up to support the government to meet these challenges, to assist in developing balanced urban development policies, promoting evidence-based research and advocacy, and providing capacity building and technical support to central and regional governments.

URDI is the centerpiece a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in September 2011 between UN-Habitat and the Government of the Union of Myanmar, represented by the Ministry of Construction on several areas of policy and technical cooperation including formulation of Housing Policy, National Building Code, National Urban Development Strategy, City Development Strategies, and implementation of Safer Settlements Initiatives.

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*URDI is the leading urban institute promoting balanced urban development through innovative partnerships for capacity building, research and knowledge management*