

Self-assessments of capacity for planning: Key findings

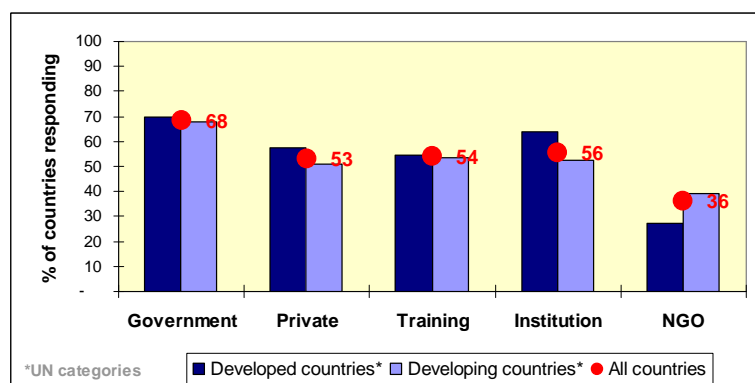
Within 5 months of its launch, over 1250 people involved in planning in 103 countries have responded to an online self-diagnostic tool to assess capacity for planning in their countries. This bulletin summarises the responses to the tool. It describes real life insights volunteered by a very broad cross-section of the international community of planners.

In this bulletin we highlight the main areas where respondents think planning capacity should be enhanced. We focus particularly on three elements of capacity: skilled people, information sources, and freedom from constraints. In October and November 2008, we are reporting to the Global Planners Network (GPN) Congress and the World Urban Forum 4. Full technical reports can be found at www.rtpi.org.uk/international¹.

© The planning community

Respondents to the tool are planners who work in local and national governments, the private sector, non-government organisations (NGOs), academia and training organisations and professional institutions.

When viewed overall, their responses demonstrate how much the nature of planning varies from place to place. This causes us to interpret 'planning capacity' as the capacity of planners to do their job whatever that job is.



© The local 'look' of planning

Planners in different countries identify an 'evolution' in planning organisations. The most well-established planning systems, and those considered to be most effective by respondents, appear to be based most strongly on principles of equity and transparency and these are values that are becoming more accepted in countries where planning is emerging. In other countries, planning is felt to operate under a 'ceiling' and has fewer such values influencing it.

*"Sustainable development,
increasing social and
economic cohesion"*

Romania

Respondents feel that the evolution process can be frustrated by a lack of political will for planning to become a part of the development process. They see themselves struggling to keep pace with development while facing attitudinal barriers to their work. Where planning is not embedded in local realities it cannot achieve the best outcomes. In these places problems like suburbanisation and informal settlements continue to grow.

Respondents want planning to be adaptable and to respond more sensitively to social, economic and environmental changes. Reactive coping strategies are part of this flexible approach, however, there are ways in which planners can better prepare for the challenges they face. More positive views of the role of planning helps as do greater opportunities for planning to shape development.

There is also a clear desire for planning to be less hierarchical and more holistic. Much more explicitly, respondents say they want to become more expansive by looking outwards towards other professions.

© The power of planning to shape development

Planners are aware of the ways in which they can have a positive impact and they are keen to communicate this to the international community. Four strong themes emerge from their responses:

- i. **Enhancing the quality of life** in human settlements is the aim of good planning. Planners use all types of information, such as demographics and economic data to feed into the creation of liveable settlements. Planners place high value on sensitivity to population needs, local culture and history as well as future trends. A sense of place and working with aesthetic considerations of an area are important for development and the desirability of a place for habitation.

- Quality of Life**
- Affordable housing
 - Community empowerment through participation
 - Cultural identity preservation
 - Design for health, safety & lifestyle considerations
 - Maximising space for local employment opportunities
 - Public space development
 - Service provision especially viable transport & mobility

- Balanced Settlements**
- Adequate infrastructure
 - Appropriate materials
 - Drinkable water supply
 - Good sanitation, sewerage, and waste disposal
 - Modelling & city planning for sustainable design
 - Redistribution of benefits of land & regeneration
 - Spatial containment of urban areas
 - Transport connectivity
 - Visioning for the future

- ii. **Balanced settlements** are centred on the integration of the many layers of physical development. They respond to pressures of growth or decline on infrastructure, and the need to resource the area especially with energy, sanitation and water. Planning helps to monitor construction, and develop an understanding of durable urban design in a local context.

- iii. **Harmonious environments** underpin planning's pivotal role in managing the environmental pressures, both in terms of resource use and natural hazards. This includes environmental resource preservation planning to mitigate disasters, trend monitoring, and information provision and knowledge sharing in order to achieve the best outcomes.

- Harmonious Environments**
- Biodiversity preservation
 - Disaster resilience planning (best materials)
 - Energy conservation
 - Food security
 - Hazard monitoring
 - Natural heritage conservation
 - Pollution control
 - Soil quality protection (appropriate land use)
 - Water quality promotion

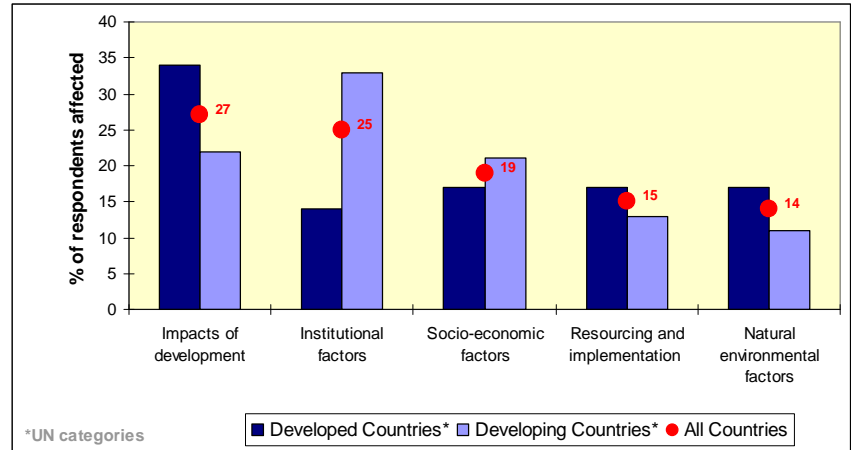
- Engagement & Inclusion**
- Advocacy of needs of marginal areas
 - Balancing various interests
 - Conflict resolution
 - Development resource negotiation
 - Integration of land use disciplines
 - Monitoring of programme roll-out
 - Professional advisory on land management
 - Redistribution of benefits of land
 - Weighing risks (e.g. economic vs. environmental)

- iv. **Engagement and inclusion** of all groups of people involved in or potentially affected by development allows planners to demarcate and monitor common interests to resolve conflicts that arise. Land use issues affect people differently within cities, regions and even across territorial borders. Planning can offer a structured way to negotiate interests at

various levels of governance.

© **What are the main concerns of the global planning community?**

Planners' unique contribution in shaping development cuts across the work of many other professionals. Planners identify the following challenges confronting them.



Around a quarter of our community of planners say managing the impact of development is their greatest challenge, but it can be addressed by:

- attaining balance
- negotiating conflicting interests
- achieving long-term durability
- protection of urban heritage
- promotion of high quality urban design
- avoiding sprawl

“On a large scale China is in a historic period of fast paced urbanisation... industrial development and upgrading urban construction must provide adequate quality and efficiency of space...”
China

For one quarter of respondents their greatest challenge lies with increasing planning capacity:

- increasing skills, resources and tools
- increasing community participation
- external promotion of planning
- garnering political will
- building regulation of land

“Violation of existing laws, rules & regulation, weak professional strength due to limited institutions”
India

Socio-economic concerns are the greatest challenge for around one fifth of these planners:

- poverty
- resource consumption
- economic growth
- changes in populations
- health and quality of life
- social cohesion

“Proliferation of informal human settlements... planning for people in a forced migration set up (internally displaced persons as well as refugees from other countries)”
Kenya

For some planners the greatest challenge is adequately resourcing and

implementing development e.g. with:

- infrastructure
- energy
- transport
- housing
- waste facilities

“Location of facilities ...waste disposal...power lines, and provision of basic essentials as water and effluent disposal.”
Nigeria

“Badly controlled and over consumption of arable lands, exposure to major natural and technological risks...over-consumption of natural resources and unsustainable development”
Algeria

The natural environmental also presents significant challenges for respondents:

- climate change
- natural disasters
- agriculture
- soil
- water
- air quality
- biodiversity

© Tools for the job

Information is a core planning resource. Some information is collected as part of a planner's daily work, such as current policies or the views of interested parties. For certain types of data such as land title and development proposals, planners are dependent on other specialist professions to provide good quality information in a practical and timely manner.

Details of unauthorised developments tend to be difficult to obtain everywhere, but surprisingly respondents report that details even of authorised developments can be insufficient for their needs when compared, for example with socio-economic data. Land title, scale maps and relevant environmental or geological information are inadequate in many places. The opportunities for planners to share and exchange new knowledge are considered insufficient by planners everywhere.

© Skills for the job

Planners need a vast array of skills, and combinations of skills, specific to the environment in which they work and to the type of planning they do. Planners must constantly renew and widen their skill base according to need. Their ability to do so is most difficult where planning skills are not valued, or sidelined by other professional fields, and where there is low political will for planning.

Key steps to boost planning skills therefore include: provision of relevant and up-to-the minute information resources; cooperation between departments and specialisms; networking and sharing experiences with peers; and lobbying to get new priorities on the development agenda.

© Key messages

Throughout the world, there exists a highly skilled and dedicated body of planners, with a wide variety of skills and training, who can contribute immensely to improving the way that settlements develop.

These planners are confronting the challenges that lie at the heart of most development goals.

This community needs to establish itself more deeply and to obtain wider recognition of its potential.

A barrier to them doing so is their global dispersal which constrains flows of up-to-date information, data and ideas.

Our respondents are enthusiastic about obtaining support from the Global Planning Community in supporting their work.

¹ The Capacity Assessment work has been developed by the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Commonwealth Association of Planners with the generous support of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and the RTPI Trust. For more information please contact the research team at the RTPI by email globalplanning@rtpi.org.uk, post The Royal Town Planning Institute, 41 Botolph Lane, London, UK EC3R 8DL, telephone [+44 \(0\)20 7929 9494](tel:+44(0)2079299494) or fax [+44 \(0\)20 7929 9490](tel:+44(0)2079299490).