

Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform

**NAPC**

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# **Infrastructure Development and Future Horizons in Syria**

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## **Introduction**

Regarding the government's increasing interest of in human and economic development issues and as a result of its focus on the sustainable development issues at the national level, the importance of developing different sectors of infrastructure in the economic growth process appears as the first priority. In this context, infrastructure plays a key role in economic development, which is compatible with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)<sup>1</sup>. MDGs stress the significance of the contribution of infrastructure to assist in the deliverance of basic services such as safe drinking water and basic sanitation, schools, electricity, and health clinic, which positively affect the human development issues like health and education. Moreover, infrastructure (energy, telecommunication, and roads) are considered, if accompanied by supportive economic policy, as the main elements to create the suitable climate for economic growth including rural economic sides.

Furthermore, infrastructure supports the social and economic growth directly by its contribution to the improvement of household livelihoods by providing several crucial services (drinking water, sanitation, transportation, and energy), which positively affect individual productivity from one side. On the other side, they contribute to decreases in production cost and marketing, and facilitate benefits reaped from communication and transport services, which improve competitiveness and promote economic and human growth at the national level.

## **Development of Infrastructure Sectors in Syria**

The transportation, energy, telecommunication, drinking water, and sanitation sectors are considered to be the main physical infrastructure sectors in Syria, which are essential elements in the comprehensive economic development. Considering separately each sector, it is obvious the positive tangible progress that has been achieved through the last decades. In addition, it is recognizable that the introduction and development of industrial cities as a new sector, has enhanced economic growth by attracting new investments and offering additional employment opportunities.

Regarding the transportation sector, Syria has witnessed an expansion of the road network at an average annual growth rate of 4% increased from 19,819 kilometers in 1980 to 49,977 kilometers in 2005 according to The Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006 (CBS, 2006). The expansion of road networks has continued for the central as well for local and agricultural roads, which reflect positive effects on the remote and rural areas development.

Electricity production has increased from 3,837 Million Kilo Watt Per Hour (M.K.W.H) in 1980 to 36,048 in 2005 at an average annual growth rate of 9.8%. During the same period, the electricity demand has grown at an average of 8-10 percent annually. According to the projections of the Ministry of Electricity, the figure is expected to reach 49 billion KWH in 2010 and 94 billion KWH in 2020. Therefore, the Ministry is investing heavily to increase capacity to meet these growing demands through new power plants and renewable energy and in order.

The telecommunication sector has witnessed an increased improvement during last decades, for example, in 2005, the fixed telephone lines amounted 2.91 million, and the number of fax subscribers reached 27,245 subscribers. In addition, mobile cellular telephone subscribers amounted 2.77 million, while the e-mail and internet subscribers are only 216,000 and the number of subscribers in integrated digital network was 6,961 (CBS, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> The Millennium Development Goals are concrete targets endorsed by 189 countries at the September 2000 UN Millennium General Assembly in New York aiming at cutting by half the proportion of people in extreme poverty worldwide by 2015, provide education, improve health, and preserve the environment.

According to the government commitment to benefit from the new technology to achieve socio-economic goals, it is important to mention the strategy of The Information and Communication Technology in Syria, which set the following targets to be achieved by the year 2013: 30 lines of fixed and mobile telephone per 100 people; 20 sub-subscribers internet penetration per 100 people; and of 30 computers per 100 people.

According to official statistics of Central Bureau of Statistics, 2005, water drinking supply sector has achieved an average annual growth rate of 6.3%, increasing from 301,432 m<sup>3</sup> in 1980 to 1,297,785 m<sup>3</sup> in 2005. The number of subscribers has also increased from 469,818 subscribers in 1980 to 2,808,515 subscribers in 2005 at an average growth rate of 7.7% yearly.

The main findings of “the multi-indicators survey about health, social, and rearing the child in SAR, by CBS in 2000” highlighted that about 71.6% of population are served by public sanitation network, this figure increases to 96.2% in urban areas and decreases to 43.9% in rural areas. In this context, the government is showing more interest in this sector, for that, the budget allocated to sewage projects rose by 600% in the current five year plan compared with earlier years, a total budget of SP 37 billion had been allocated to develop sewage and sanitation projects across the country in the period 2006-2010.

With the aim of attracting new investments and lessening the pressure on the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, a new step of developing the infrastructure at the national level has been taken by the development of industrial cities (IC). In this context, three ICs in Damascus (Adra), Aleppo (Sheikh Najjar) and Homs (Hessia) have been established recently. The government trusts that the establishment of these cities depends on the competitive Syrian geographical location to attract investments and due to the relatively cheap labour and energy. Moreover, a new IC in the eastern area of Deir-ez-Zor is also under consideration.

## **Recommendations**

Starting from the brief presentation of the importance role of infrastructure in development, in general, and depending on its current situation in Syria, it is essential to mention the urgent need for accelerating its growth rate. In fact, it is vital for infrastructure to be compatible with the high population growth rate, especially in specific areas like Rural Damascus and Damascus city from one side, and on the other in order to achieve qualitative jumps in some sectors (transportation and energy) in accordance with the currently international economic developments needs.

### Transport sector

- Promote the private sector to play greater role in improving transport services;
- Develop the transport means should be consistent with the international standards;
- Consider the environmental dimensions (entering transport equipments using non-polluting safety sources of energy like electricity).

### The energy sector

- Improve the quality of the current electricity used network;
- Rationalize current consumption;
- Allow the private sector to producing and supplying the energy, especially in rural areas, to alleviate the burden on the government shoulders;
- Introduce cheap, safety alternative sources of energy e.g. water, wind, solar, and peace nuclear energy sources.

### Communication sector

- Stress the achievement of the goals of the National Strategy for Information and Communication Technologies to reach the obviously mentioned diffusion rates;
- Reduce the utilization costs to be consistent with the average per capita income to help people achieve the information society.

### Drinking water and sanitation sector

- Rationalize water consumption and treat sanitation water and polluted wells;
- Promote the role played by private and joint sectors and their interaction with the beneficiaries.

Finally, it is vital to set up the scientific bases for studying separately each sector with consideration of their current situation. This must be done so that it is possible to better understand their development abilities and, depending on the availability of the natural and human resources and to comprehend their potential significance in the pursuit of economic and social development.