Madinat Khalifa Master Plan

Submitted By: The King's Foundation



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning

Organization Type: National government

Website: https://housing.gov.bh/

Practice Details

Country(ies): Bahrain

City(ies): Southern Governorate

Start Year: 2012

Ongoing: Yes

End Year: N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Social Housing
- Housing, Land & Spatial Planning
- Housing Policy, Legislation & Governance

Relevant SDGs:



UN-HABITAT

Problem & Context

Bahrain's urban development is at a critical juncture, shaped by rapid growth, car dependency, urban sprawl, and the tension between modernisation and cultural identity. Government policy focuses on delivering numbers instead of integrated, mixed-use communities, resulting in low-density settlements and highway-dominated transport. A major challenge lies in the fragmented planning system: ministries work in silos, responsibilities and timescales are poorly aligned, and outdated zonal planning approaches limit holistic outcomes. These gaps in policy and governance have hindered the creation of sustainable urban forms. To address this, the King's Foundation, in collaboration with the Government of Bahrain, developed Madinat Khalifa as an exemplar project. By coordinating the Ministry of Housing and other agencies, the project seeks to integrate housing with land uses, infrastructure, and amenities, offering a joined-up model for sustainable, resilient urban development in Bahrain.

Solution Developed

The Madinat Khalifa project was developed by the King's Foundation in partnership with the Government of Bahrain to address fragmented planning, housing shortages, and car-dependent sprawl. Targeting Bahraini families as beneficiaries, the project sought to create not just housing, but a fully functioning town that integrates homes with jobs, services, and amenities. Its objectives were to deliver walkable, mixed-use neighbourhoods, promote sustainable resilience, and foster social cohesion by grounding new development within its cultural and geographic context. The masterplan introduced polycentric planning principles, moving away from single-use zoning toward intermixing functions at block, plot, and building levels to reduce reliance on cars. Innovative approaches included introducing co-design workshops and charrettes to build cross-ministerial collaboration, setting new street and utility standards, and creating design guidance to align agencies. Sustainability measures—such as improved building envelopes, greywater reuse, and provision for solar energy—further enhanced its effectiveness as an exemplar of integrated town-building in Bahrain.

Implementation

The implementation was sponsored by the Prime Minister's Office, with the Ministry of Housing as the lead and masterplan owner. Key ministries included Works (roads), UDPA (planning), Municipalities (local services, landscape, public realm), EWA (utilities), Transportation (strategic routes), and the Southern Governor's Office (community engagement). The King's Foundation facilitated cross-ministerial collaboration, introducing workshops and co-design charrettes to overcome siloed working, build capacity, and establish a shared vision.

From 2012–2015, co-design sessions created the concept masterplan, followed by preliminary design (2015–2017) and a 120-home demonstration project (2016). A steering committee oversaw approvals and integration of new urbanism standards, and in 2019, revisions reflected

updated regulations, but core principles—polycentric village structure, walkable mixed-use neighbourhoods, and sustainable infrastructure—remained intact.

Innovative measures included new road and utility standards and urban design guidance to support long-term delivery, with combined government investment, technical expertise from the Foundation, and multi-agency partnerships. Sustainability strategies such as greywater reuse, improved building envelopes, solar integration, shaded streets, and multimodal transport were embedded. A current pilot project explores delivery models for mixed-use centres, aiming to scale lessons across Bahrain's future urban development.

Enablers & Obstacles

The political will of the Prime Minister's Office as the project sponsor was the key influencing factor to the realization and successful implementation of the entire process, from the codesign approach through to the community engagement and feedback, and the adoption of the master plan principles. There was significant resistance to the collaborative approach due to ingrained habits of silo working, but over time, and with the appointment and buy-in of key government agency leadership, these have been overcome. Through a consistent presentation of the benefits of the new methodology i.e. the reduced land take due to the rationalized building typologies, the health benefits from promoting walking and reduced car dependency, the financial benefits and efficiencies of cross sector collaboration; we have been able to convert and change thinking around effective and appropriate delivery vehicles for urban development.

Results & Impact

There are no quantitative or qualitative results yet: the project's main partner are carrying out a survey of the first 120 homes but this is still ongoing. Broader and long-term impacts are more nebulous: the project aspirations are for better quality of life, but this is dependent on achieving the proposed mixed use town building including employment uses. We intend together with partners to create a satisfaction matrix once a large % of the town is built to review success against the aspirations as set.

Replication & Scale Up

A key factor will be the support of government and ministries and an ongoing programme of learning and teaching through practical exemplars. This should be combined with a review process whereby all stakeholders participate in a workshop to identify best practice and successful approaches with a clear mandate for change and improvement.

The consultative and design approach, i.e. the use of workshops and exploration of public-private partnerships and/or single vehicle delivery agencies such as development corporations can be scaled and replicated.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice is a new or innovative practice that is not yet adequately or fully integrated into formal policy frameworks.

The approach is new and innovative in terms of making collaborative stakeholder workshops central to the design visioning process, as well as in looking to establish joint venture single delivery vehicles be they public/private partnerships or development corporations to deliver town building.

Lessons & Takeaways

The statutory land allocations to provide for utilities infrastructure and roads is still excessive, and we would advocate reduced street widths and traffic velocities to prioritise the human perspective and experience and urge for improved coordination between infrastructure and utility providers for efficiency.