



UN-HABITAT

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One of the major challenges Africa faces in achieving sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is the process of rapid and irreversible urbanization. *(Paragraph 56 (m) of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document and targets 10 and 11 of the MDG 7 specifically address the issue of urban poverty).*

We can no longer afford to think about sustainable development without taking full recognition of the increasing population growth, especially in urban centers, medium and small size towns and peri-urban centers.

Indeed, **there can be no sustainable development without sustainable urbanization.** “Sustainable Urbanisation” is a multi-dimensional dynamic process that includes not only environmental but also social, economic and political-institutional sustainability.

African Urbanization

Africa is the fastest urbanizing continent in the world. By the year 2030, it is anticipated that Africa will cease to be a predominantly rural society.

Rapid, unplanned and chaotic urbanization, coupled with unemployment and underemployment in the cities of Africa, will contribute to the urbanization of poverty where the majority of poor people will be found living predominantly in slums. In the last 15 years, the number of slum dwellers in the region has almost doubled from 101 million in 1990, to 199 million in 2005. At current slum growth rates in the region, the number of slum dwellers is projected to double by 2020, reaching nearly 400 million.

In their current state, African cities are ill-equipped to provide the jobs, the housing and the basic services, including access to clean water and basic sanitation, to enable its citizen's to live healthy and productive lives. And, while African cities and towns have the potential of becoming engines of growth and economic development, they are fast becoming centers of misery, squalor, poverty, crime, violence, insecurity and social exclusion. On average, 71% of the urban population in Africa lives in slums, without adequate shelter, basic services such as clean water and sanitation or security of tenure.

Slum Upgrading

If Africa is to meet the Millennium Development Goals slum upgrading provides a unique opportunity for attaining the MDGs at the local level. For example there is considerable evidence that security of tenure and improvements in shelter, water and sanitation have a direct impact on the achievement of the other MDGs. By improving the lives of slum dwellers, it is possible to combat malnutrition and diseases, many of which are directly linked to overcrowding and to the lack of clean water and improved sanitation. Slum improvement also helps improve environmental sustainability and addresses gender inequality in the most efficient manner.

At UN-HABITAT we believe that the crisis of rapid urbanization can be turned around especially as slum upgrading provides a unique opportunity for the attainment of the MDGs.

This is why UN-HABITAT calls for governments to adopt, as a matter of urgency, pro-poor, gender sensitive urban policies, legislations and action plans.

A high degree of political commitment at the level of national and local government is also needed. At the same time, it is important to recognize the important role of local authorities for participatory planning and mobilizing investments in housing, urban infrastructure and basic services.

Several countries in Africa are already engaged in slum upgrading programmes. For example, North Africa has reduced the proportion of slum dwellers from 38% to 28%, between 1990 and 2005. In East Africa, UN-HABITAT is working with city authorities on developing Strategic Urban Planning Development Plans with the participation of the urban poor.

Rural-Urban Linkages

At UN-HABITAT we also believe that we can no longer afford to continue with the old dichotomy of rural *versus* urban development. Human settlements policies and sustainable development strategies should be conceived within the framework of rural-urban linkages or continuum.

There can be no question that rural and urban areas are economically, socially and environmentally interdependent. Cities are engines of national economic growth, the principle market place for value-added agricultural production, and the interface for global trade and development. In other words, rural development, in a rapidly urbanizing and globalizing world, depends increasingly on robust urban economies, which in turn, depend on investments in urban and regional infrastructures and services.

Therefore we at UN-HABITAT believe that an effective rural-urban linkage development program has great potential in reducing the pace of migration from rural to urban areas and in delivering balanced territorial development. Small and medium sized towns serve as nodes for economic growth when they are well linked to each other and to larger urban centres. They offer not only markets for farm produce, but also seasonal off farm employment to the rural poor and landless -- people who would otherwise flock to the slums in the ever expanding capital cities.

As part of the Rural-Urban Linkages Support Programme (RULSUP), UN-HABITAT, in collaboration with other partners, has launched the Lake Victoria Local economic Development Programme (LV-LED) which aims at strengthening the regional economy, through improved agricultural productivity and the development of complementary urban markets.

UN-HABITAT encourages governments to include rural-urban linkages in their respective national and sub-national development planning processes.

Land

Land is a critical ingredient for sustainable urban development and for supporting the poor to access asset and livelihood. However, land is a particularly critical issue in Africa.

It is estimated that in all of Africa, less than 15 percent of the land has been officially registered with title deeds, and in the case of sub-Saharan Africa it is only 1 percent of the land, most of it being titled for high-level income groups. In the case of land in urban areas, little progress has been made in providing access to land for pro-poor housing.

Some of the key challenges facing African countries in achieving sustainable urbanization are unequal access and distribution of land and its resources, continuum of land rights, gender equity, land governance, land information, regulatory framework and capacity building.

Secure land tenure and property rights are the key to achieving sustainable development and the MDGs, because they underpin economic development, social inclusion and proper environmental management.

However, the greatest challenges in providing secure land and property rights are in urban, peri-urban areas, and the most productive rural areas. Together, these areas face growing demands for land for housing, property development and commercial investment in agriculture for biofuels for instance. In urban and peri-urban areas, UN-HABITAT argues that, wherever possible, increased tenure security is needed in informal settlements wherever possible. Additionally, land must be made available to meet future needs for urban expansion, while preserving vital agriculture and other land resources such as water, habitat and species.

Fortunately, there is a renewed interest and commitment of several African countries to get their land policies 'right'. For example, many African countries are now recognizing the customary and other *de facto* rights within the continuum of land and property rights. They are also introducing the principle of sustainability, equity and gender sensitiveness in their land policies. Another initiative, the AUC/ECA/AfDB African land policy framework which aims at develop a framework and guidelines on land policy in Africa, as well as benchmarks and indicators for measuring progress on land policy formulation and implementation by African countries.

Water and Sanitation

Unplanned and chaotic urban growth in African cities puts extreme pressure on urban basic services, including water and sanitation services, and negatively affects the livelihood of the urban poor, which in turn impacts on economic development.

UN-HABITAT believes that the struggle to provide safe water, basic sanitation to achieve the Millennium Development Goals will require a much more integrated approach that takes into account the growing crisis of rapid and unplanned urbanization

If the international community is to meet the water and sanitation targets, UN-HABITAT recommends that there is increased support for investment in capacity building to help utilities design effective business plans that also include conservation strategies. It is also important to phase investments in physical/social infrastructure, with a view to focusing on the poor.

UN-HABITAT is also encouraging new financing models for sub-regions/groups of small towns/rural agglomerations/areas that require special resource conservation and protection. This includes adopting new approaches to monitoring coverage to meeting the MDGs and beyond.

In keeping with the above recommendations UN-HABITAT's Water and Sanitation programme in Africa has launched the Lake Victoria Water and sanitation Initiative which focuses on the provision of improved water and sanitation to rapidly growing secondary towns in the region to meet the MDG 7 Water and Sanitation targets. UN-HABITAT's Water Operators Partnerships (WOPs) is designed to help water utility operators pool their collective expertise and share with one another in order to improve significantly the overall level of performance. Finally, UN-HABITAT has also established CAPEX which encourages greater investment for capacity building projects in water and sanitation in small urban centers.

Conclusion

It is UN-HABITAT's hope that such recent projects and programmes will help increase pro-poor urban investment in shelter and infrastructure. It is only through increased political will and financial resources targeted at the urban poor, that Africa will manage to succeed in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Though rapid urbanization is an enormous challenge, we at UN-HABITAT feel that investment in slum upgrading and urban infrastructure provides an important opportunity to make a difference. Investment in sustainable urbanization is a sure way to sustainable development.