



ECOSOC • Integration Segment (27–29 May, 2014)
SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION

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**UNITED NATIONS
CENTRE FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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Inputs from UNCRD

It is widely recognized that sustainable urbanization is one of the critical elements for achieving sustainable development. Urbanization brings both opportunities and challenges. Cities are the agents of economic, social, cultural, technologic and political changes and advancement¹. Rapid urbanization has also generated formidable challenges to national and city governments, especially in the areas of governance, urban service delivery, socio-economic capacity, planning, mobility and the general environment. The urban economic growth has largely been mirrored by increasing levels of urban poverty, growing slum dwellers, social and economic inequality, inefficiency and the concomitant impacts on vital renewable and non-renewable natural resources. Despite the implications of the rapid urban growth, most urban governments lack the capacity to deal with these challenges. Mr. Wu, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs stated that he agreed with the prediction of many experts that “the battle of the future sustainable development will be won and lost in cities.”² He also noted that “Natural resource endowment, climatic conditions, as well as social, cultural and political values vary from place to place. There can, therefore, not be any ‘one size fits all solution’”.³ What is urgently needed, therefore, is the capacity-building of local authorities and all the stakeholders in making informed decisions for the durable solutions.

Challenges of Cities and Territories

Although each city faces its own particular situation and challenges, an attempt is made below to present some of the key common challenges:

- **Rising disparities** in income and high levels of poverty among urban population, seen in the emergence of sometimes large informal settlements in and around major cities. Although the target 7d of the MDG on slum dwellers has been met, the number of people living in slum conditions continues to increase, estimated at 863 million in 2012, compared to 760 million in 2000 and 650 million in 1990.
- **Urban infrastructure continues to be inadequate**, including water, transportation and waste management. In particular, poor transportation infrastructure impedes labour mobility and efficiency in logistics, as well as access to social services, including education and medical services.
- With more population, **more energy is required** and **more waste is generated**. The world cities occupy just 2 per cent of land, but account for 60-80 per cent of energy consumption, 75 per cent of carbon emission and consumption of 70 per cent of all resources. Currently world cities generate about 1.3 billion tons of

¹ UN-Habitat (2011), *The Economic Role of Cities*, UN-Habitat, Nairobi, Kenya.

² Under-Secretary-General Mr. Wu’s address at the High-Level Symposium on Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Urbanization, held in Yangzhou, China in December 2013.

³ The Invited Lecture of the Under-Secretary-General Mr. Wu on “The cities we want” at the 3rd International Forum on the “Future City” Initiative, held in Kitakyushu City, Japan in October 2013.

solid waste per year and the volume is expected to increase to 2.2 billion tons by 2025.

- **Growing motorization and lack of land use and transport planning integration.** In case of many developing countries of Asia, efforts to introduce/enforce cleaner fuels and vehicle emission standards, may greatly reduce vehicle emissions, but on the other hand the number of private vehicles is growing rapidly, which may off set much of the emission control progress. Most developing cities have not effectively addressed the complex inter-linkages among land use mix, public transport planning, travel choices, travel demand management (TDM), environmental externalities, and quality of life (green areas, recreational parks/open spaces, amount of residential space per person, etc.).

Opportunities for Solutions in Asia

Efforts to diversify revenue bases become an important strategy for cities. For example, environmental fiscal measures (taxes and fees) can raise fiscal revenues while promoting environmental goals. Mobilising private finance is equally important to fill the funding gap for many urban green infrastructure projects.

The role of different levels of government should be clearly understood among all actors. In particular, the role of national governments should not be understated. It would be worth examining whether **national urban policy frameworks** are put in place in Asian countries, and especially such frameworks include the perspective of green growth.

Community-based approach is increasingly adopted in Asian cities (e.g. community-based recycling in Surabaya, Indonesia). Such approach tends to complement the lack of capacity in the local government by sharing the responsibility between the local community and the public sector. Moreover, it is likely to create local jobs.

Multistakeholder partnership also offers effective mechanisms for promoting implementation. IPLA, an international partnership being coordinated by UNCRD, seeks to promote zero waste society in cooperation with municipalities and private sector.

To reflect the fast-growing feature of Asian cities, specific indicators may be required. Bangkok 2020 Declaration (2010 – 2020) on Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST)⁴ and Ha Noi 3R Declaration (2013 – 2023)⁵ offer goals and targets in their respective field to policy makers. They also include potential indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of progress in implementation.

Key challenges and opportunities for African cities

⁴ Adoted at the Fifth Regional EST Forum in Asia, held in Bangkok, Thailand from 23 to 25 August 2010, co-organized by UNCRD, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONROE), Thailand, Ministry of the Environment of the Government of Japan, UN ESCAP.

⁵ Adopted at the Fourth Regional 3R Forum, held in Ha Noi, Viet Nam from 18 to 20 March 2013, co-organized by UNCRD, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONROE), Viet Nam, and Ministry of the Environment of the Government of Japan,

Africa is the fastest urbanizing continent with an estimated growth rate of 3.4 per cent.⁶ Africa's cities and urban centers have been growing at a faster rate than anywhere else in the world. Between 1960 and 2010, Africa's urban population grew from 53 million to 400 million.⁷ By 2030, the number of Africans living in towns and cities will increase by a further 345 million. It is further projected that the urban population will reach one billion in 2040, and to 1.23 billion in 2050, by which time 60 per cent of all Africans will be living in cities.⁸

Several key trends can be discerned. There is single city-dominance in some regions, for example Maputo with 60 per cent of Mozambique's urban population and Dakar with 65 per cent of Senegal's urban population. Secondly, there is urban sprawl. The largest urban sprawls are in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition, small and medium-sized urban areas are expanding rapidly and will play a significant role in shaping Africa's urban transition.

Urban poverty, informal employment and unplanned settlement: Rapid urbanization has often been followed by urban poverty, with prospects of a dignified and productive life continuing to elude the poorest among Africans. As a result, more and more urban poor are pushed into the informal sector and unplanned settlements, with as many as nine out of ten urban workers in Africa being employed informally, working long hours at very low incomes. Despite African cities generating about 55 per cent of the continent's total GDP, a massive 43 per cent of its urban population lives below the poverty line, exceeding 50 per cent in several sub-Saharan nations. Using a poverty line of US\$2 a day, about 200 million urban residents live in poverty.

Inadequate urban services: The main challenge currently facing local governments in African cities is how to provide essential services; including housing, energy, water, health, and education, to meet the basic needs of an ever-growing urban population. However, inadequate services are more a symptom of the low institutional, technical, infrastructural and financial capacities which require skilled and innovative management.

Climate change and vulnerability: With the unprecedented increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters, urban settlements in Africa have become increasingly vulnerable. This is mainly due to a combination of factors including urban poverty, unsustainable urban planning and substandard shelter, and adverse effects of climate change. Changes in the frequency, intensity and duration of climate extremes (droughts, floods, heat waves, among others) have adversely affected the livelihoods of the urban population, particularly the poor and other vulnerable communities who live in slums and marginalized settlements. Extreme changes in weather patterns have increased incidences of natural disasters and impacted on all key sectors of the economy, including the urban economy, agriculture and forestry, water resources, coastal areas and settlements and

⁶ UN-Habitat and UNEP (2010) *The State of African Cities 2010: Governance, Inequality and Urban Land Markets*, UN-Habitat, Nairobi, Kenya.

⁷ FAO (2012) *Growing Greener Cities in Africa: First status report on urban and peri-urban horticulture in Africa*, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, Italy.

⁸ UN-Habitat and UNEP (2010).

health. African cities' ability and readiness to predict and respond to potential complex emergencies, as well as to mitigate natural and other disasters through disaster risk reduction approaches, climate change adaptation planning and ecosystems management, are either very weak or altogether lacking. Other African cities have “ecologically unfriendly” configurations such as the use of heat-retaining building materials that raise city temperatures and hence compromise their resilience to climate change; while others such as Accra, Durban, Lagos, Luanda and Maputo are located in low-lying coastal areas that are prone to flooding. This calls for concerted measures to integrate the planning processes of urbanization and industrialization to curb and manage anthropogenic activities that cause climate change. Urban service delivery strategies, including housing aspects of development have to be also integrated in the planning and management policies. African countries have neither the economic power nor the human capacity to cope with the impacts of climate changes. At the same time, Africa lacks the technology to mitigate and regulate effectively air pollution caused by industrialization as well as the ever-increasing motor vehicles.

Slums and inadequate housing: Despite the apparent stability of slum proportions in the world, more individuals, majority being from African cities, are being pushed into slum settlements. Africa has the world’s biggest slum population of 210 million people who live in inadequate and overcrowded houses.⁹ The high slums prevalence is attributed to structural and governance failures in the distribution of public goods and services, as well as lack of human and financial resources to address urban poverty. Urban slums are major threats to Africa's urban stability and, by extension, political stability. An urban leader need to plan to accommodate future urban growth, including providing the poor with serviced land to build and improve their own housing.

Urban inequalities: The economic growth recorded in many African countries over the past decade has been a key driver of Africa’s urbanization and has raised hopes of a new era of shared prosperity. However, in most countries, economic growth has been followed by higher levels of urban inequality, hunger and poverty in the urban areas. On average, African cities exhibit the highest inequalities in the world, both individually and collectively. Individually, many of the cities fall within the *very high* and *extremely high* inequality brackets.

Poor urban governance: Urban governance is a key factor in the reduction of urban poverty. It makes for the difference between a well-managed and inclusive city, and a poorly-managed and exclusive city. African cities are unable to respond to most urban challenges owing to their prevailing institutional weaknesses among other constraints. At the level of formal institutions, structural weaknesses and poor governance procedures exert a heavy burden on the poor. Additionally, most of the cities lack structures and processes that mediate the involvement of citizens in the mainstream urban life. They also lack decision-making mechanisms that reflect the wishes of the poor and allocate

⁹ York, S. (2012) *Africa: Green Cities & the Challenges of Urbanization*, in <http://populationgrowth.org/africa-green-cities-the-challenges-of-urbanization/>

public resources to high-return activities. Endemic corruption also leads to ineffective delivery of services, inability to adapt, and compromises those most at risk, thereby exacerbating their vulnerability during crises.

Urban environmental management: Environmental vulnerability of African cities is quite evident. As the cities get overcrowded, pollution of the urban environment exacerbates environmental disasters and contributes to health-related problems. Industrial, traffic and residential emissions, crude dumping of solid waste, sewer leakages and water effluents contribute to the degradation of environmental health in the already overcrowded cities. Communicable diseases also threaten the life and health of urban dwellers.

Urban-Rural linkages: Another challenge is how to stimulate local economic activity that promotes sustainable economic growth that involves rural as well as urban areas. Towns function as service centres for their rural hinterlands, offering outlets for rural products, public and commercial services, and employment opportunities, while rural areas provide raw materials, labor and demand for urban goods and services. In this regard, it is important to plan for effective and sustainable urban-rural linkages. Unfortunately, oftentimes, these linkages are very weak or in some cases non-existent. Consequently, there is a chronic problem of urban centres that are disconnected from the rural systems.

Urban transport management: Rising traffic and choking congestion levels are having far-reaching negative economic, social and environmental impacts on the cities. The rising use of personal cars has choked roads, endangering the safety of pedestrians and the health of city residents. Pollution, including noise and automobile emissions, has become a serious impediment to the quality of life and even the health of urban populations. This is made worse by the difficulty in enforcing regulations pertaining to vehicle inspections that address safety and emissions. With increasing sprawl, combined with weak and underfunded authorities that are unable to maintain or expand existing urban transport services, have not only increased travel distances but have also pushed up the price of public transport. Facilities for pedestrians are very poor, and those for bicycles and other non-motorized transport are nonexistent. Improving urban transport in African cities will depend on a strategy of coordinated measures to improve infrastructure, traffic management, service quality, and network reach. Africa urban managers must move quickly and come up with improved models to coordinate planning, regulation, licensing, inspections, monitoring and enforcement of urban public transport.

The mayors and senior urban officials participated in the UNCRD and UN-HABITAT Forum for Mayors and Senior Urban Officials on Sustainable Urban Development and Management in Africa, held in Nairobi, Kenya from 27 to 29 November 2013 gave particular priorities to:

- Water and sanitation;
- Solid waste management;
- Energy;
- Basic infrastructure and maintenance;

- Housing.

Key opportunities and challenges of Latin American cities

Latin America and the Caribbean is fundamentally an urban region and, at the same time, a region with large, sparsely populated areas. Almost 80 per cent of its population lives in cities and urbanization processes are virtually completed across all the region's countries. Advances in the provision of access to water, sanitation, transportation, communication and other services have raised the attractiveness of Intermediate cities, suggesting a better balance in countries' urban systems. All of this translates into a renewed urban dynamism and the emergence of new areas of economic growth, thanks to transformations in productive processes and globalization.¹⁰

More than two-thirds of the wealth of the region comes from cities and, although most of the value added is concentrated in a few large metropolitan areas, the range of cities that contribute to that wealth has been extended. Generally, in the region there is the very wealth of knowledge, experience and institutional capacity required to push forward urban and regional policies aimed at economic development and social inclusion in sectors related to housing, public spaces, water and sanitation, and transport and environmental and ecosystems management. Many cities and regions have promising environmental protection initiatives and the prevention of and response to disasters. Finally, significant progress has been made in governance, mainly by way of boosting democratization and decentralization processes. Furthermore, more responsibility has been achieved regarding the handling of resources by local and regional authorities and with respect to the need for citizens to contribute.⁸

Key Challenges:⁸

- **Inequality** remains most wide spread among the region's cities in the world. Despite economic growth and initiatives to combat poverty, there have not been significant improvements of equality. As a result, Latin American and Caribbean cities remain strongly dual, divided, and segregated spatially and socially.
- Although the proportion of **population living in slums** has fallen over the past two decades, in absolute terms the number has increased to 111 million people.
- The **number of private vehicles** has more than doubled over a 10-year period without many responses to the challenges of urban mobility, but rather the opposite. It has generated **major congestion problems**. The policies to regulate the car ownership do not succeed since they were not adopted as part of an integral city planning, including the expansion of urban sprawl.
- **Chaotic and uncontrolled urbanization** has inevitably increased the abuse of land and other natural resources and **violence** is the main concern of citizens.
- Despite deceleration in population growth, the built-up space continues to expand, resulting in a reduction in population density. The **territorial spread of cities** poses great challenges for their management and sustainability. The result has

¹⁰ The State of Latin American and Caribbean Cities 2012 – Towards a New Urban Transition, UN-HABITAT, 2012.

- been the emergence of urban areas that have a large territorial size, sometimes formalized in a metropolitan region, comprising of many municipalities and with an intense activity across all fields. These new urban forms have advantages from an economic perspective, but they also bring a range of new challenges.
- The new importance of migration and investment is occurring into **small or Intermediatete-sized cities**, whose local authorities lack capacity to manage such influxes.
 - Metropolitan regions (megacities of over 8 million people, concentrating more than 50% of the country's population), facing an increasing number of economic, environmental and human security threats to its population, such as the concentration of high rates of population and poverty, unemployment, violence and insecurity. In these territories there are wide disparities between socioeconomic groups in terms of income, access to land, property rights, employment, and basic social services. Wide disparities also exist between the provinces, municipalities, and urban and rural areas, in terms of infrastructure development, income, and of institutional capacity to face state-wide problems. Effects of existing problems extend across various jurisdictions and across various sectors, which in most cases are the result of the uncoordinated interaction of a great variety of public and private actors that have an important role in both the cause and solution of problems. There is a clear need for cooperative management among different levels of government (national, regional and local), the private sector and civil society to face threats and problems. Building institutional capacity for an efficient management of metropolitan regions is an important challenge in the countries of Latin America, particularly in the context of political decentralization, globalization, and promotion of local autonomy. This is especially relevant in areas with diverse territorial entities with jurisdictional and administrative autonomy, and no existing regional authorities responsible for managing cross-jurisdictional and cross-sectoral issues.

Key approaches and tools:

As highlighted above, regional and territorial development policy and planning is gaining clear momentum currently in Latin America, in the context of decentralization policy implemented over the past two decades. Important changes have occurred in its social, economical and political ambits, leading to continued restructuring of the institutional architecture of the States, and a territorial redistribution of competences between levels of government. Sub-national administrative and governance structures have been set, and regional levels have been recipients of a set of increased responsibilities, in line with the increasing regionalization of governmental funding. Most countries have incorporated regional and territorial development policies to define resource allocation, and address deep-rooted regional (inter- and intra-regional) inequalities¹¹, poverty and sustainable development.

¹¹ The Interagency documents prepared for Rio +20 as well as those for the preparation of post-2015 agenda in Latin America highlight that while there has been significant progress in the attainment of MDGs, real integration of the 3 pillars of sustainable development has not been achieved. This is the great challenge of Post-2015 and of the Sustainable Development Goals, to attaining the pending acute challenges (poverty, human security and human development).

In Latin America, the so-called “territorial organization” has emerged as a fundamental concept, a policy, and a planning instrument. It involves a coherent set of policies, action lines, instrumentalities and projects that seek to act on the spatial organization of a region, and to set a territorial structure that integrates in harmonious and gradual manner the aspects of population, infrastructure, economic and natural resources, in a context of sustainable development. It is a planning, management and territorial development strategy, that promotes the articulation of economic, social, cultural, environmental, administrative policies and governmental action (vertically and horizontally). This makes **territorial planning and policy** a powerful instrument to integrate sectoral development objectives and promote regional decentralized governance.

This also presented the need for strengthening capacities at both the national and sub-national levels to face the big challenges of territorial policy, policy instruments and planning, to attain sustainable development, including climate change. A major challenge in the implementation of the reform agenda lies in achieving a sustained dialogue and coordination of governmental action (vertical and horizontal) and sectoral integration in a specific territory to achieve coherent solutions, enabling administrations to effectively exercise their respective roles and increased competences. This requires sustained planning processes and project formulation, effective use of policy instruments, use of resources, monitoring of policy impact, as well as sensitization among the policymakers.

Important tool and concept for integrated decision-making at sub-national level

A **territorial approach** to sustainable development and an **integrated regional development planning (IRDP)** is a powerful instrument to attain sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth with sustainable organization of natural resources and ecosystems. IRDP has a multidisciplinary and integral approach, which addresses urban and rural linkages, a balanced distribution of population and economic activities in a spatial context to attain equity, and social cohesion. It also promotes participatory planning, an efficient territorial organization, the effective incorporation of environmental and disaster risk management (including climate change), in an integrated manner with the other sectors of territorial development (transport, housing, basic and social services, energy, water, economy, etc.). IRDP also pursues appropriate institutional arrangements to enhance resilience and better governance.¹²

The territorial approach enables addressing the three pillars of sustainable development in a concrete territory, with an endogenous vision, based on the strengths and the human and ecological priorities. It is in a specific territory where sectoral policies and all levels of government converge, evidencing inter-institutional and coordination potentialities, and also existing conflicts.

¹² What is meant by “good governance” is the application of standards such as participation, legality, transparency, accountability, consensus, equity, effectiveness, efficiency and sensitivity that lead to a state of good governance, therefore governance excellence. (Adapted from the original text of the UN ESCAP, Economic and Social Commission of the United Nations for Asia and the Pacific. www.unescap.org).

Thus, **integrated regional development planning (IRDP)** entails integrated approaches and strategies within management areas, across administrative boundaries, and across sectors, and cooperation and constructive dialogue among a wide variety of stakeholders (from different levels of government, public and private and community sectors) to achieve planning sustainability and legitimate decision making, thus better regional governance.

As evidenced in all regions, cities are expanding. Each city has its own situation and challenges. IRDP can be an effective tool for managing and promoting inclusive and sustainable cities. Because IRDP is a conscious strategy designed to bring about change and equality, and to improve living standards. The central feature of a regional-based approach is the emphasis on territorial and people centered development by fostering capacity of people and strengthening local institutions. It is a process through which communities enter into partnership with local or city governments and international as well as national organizations to reduce poverty, inequality, unemployment, and to improve the quality of human life.

In this context, a **region** is defined according to the issues being addressed. And there are different scales in both governance and issues. In addition, there are interactions between and among these different scales, such as transborder issues. Therefore, it would be best to **let the “problem” decide the proper planning and management territorial scale of intervention**. In other words, the region and scale need to be flexible in order to properly address the issues of concern. There are growing interrelations, complementarities and interdependences between the territories, which are mutually related through complex exchanges of materials (resources), services (including "environmental services"), water, energy, information and human services and population mobility. Therefore, a region can also comprise a core city and its hinterland (urban and rural), a metropolitan area, a city-region, a linear corridor, or a network of cities.

Whether sub-national or supranational, the **regional scale** can in many circumstances provide an important scale of planning that is not available through existing or traditional territorial systems of governance. In many instances administrative areas are either too small or only occupy a portion of a regional ecology and thus need to be combined at larger regional scales for collaboration. The regional scale can also provide a more efficient level of cooperation and alliances among development planning units in terms of shared costs of infrastructure and services.

Therefore, good governance requires the establishment of a constructive dialogue among the competent administrations of a region (vertically and horizontally) and the variety of stakeholders to articulate coherent territorial solutions, facilitating synergies among all actions to attain equity and sustainability.