



Interactive Panel Discussion: Sustainable urbanization in Africa
ECOSOC Chamber, 28th May, 2014, 15:00-18:00

INFORMAL SUMMARY

Highlights and recommendations

- The particularity and specific needs of Africa in the process of urbanization must be recognized and adequately addressed, throughout the process of developing the post-2015 development agenda.
- Sustainable urbanization goal should be included in the post-2015 development agenda
- National, local and regional governments in order to support sustainable urbanization must work alongside one another to create new models of multi-level governance to ensure the full implementation of development initiatives.
- Reliable financial resources must be available to ensure an effective process of sustainable urbanization, this includes support from UN agencies, international and regional partners as well as the private sector
- The self-reliance and creativity of the informal sector must be supported through the provision of services, access to land as well as through appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks.
- To keep pace with rapid urbanization in Africa there needs to be strengthened capacity for planning, revenue generation and collection, financial governance and, data gathering and analysis.

Summary

Africa is currently experiencing the highest urban growth rate in the world, at 3.3 percent. As a result, UN-Habitat predicts that by 2020, half of the African population will live in urban areas and by 2050, 20 of the world's 100 largest cities will be in Africa. Urban populations in Africa are expected to double in the next two decades and triple two decades after that. The sheer magnitude of urban growth on the continent and its impact on the three dimensions of sustainable development, sustainable urbanization lies at the heart of the continent's transformative development agenda. The rapid urbanization occurring in Africa presents strong opportunities for urbanization to be redefined and developed in a sustainable, inclusive, gender and culturally sensitive manner. Urbanization has brought the role of cities as contributing



factors to development in Africa into focus and further identifying that the numerous challenges plaguing the African region are not insurmountable but rather an opportunity to achieve sustainability.

As urban populations grow, local governments face increasing difficulty in ensuring access to energy, healthcare, housing and education as well as to services such as water and sanitation. Poor urban infrastructure only exacerbates this challenge, hindering municipal transportation, waste removal, communication and electricity services. To keep pace with rapid urbanization in Africa there needs to be strengthened capacity for planning, revenue generation and collection, financial governance and, data gathering and analysis. Reliable financial resources must be made available to ensure an effective process of sustainable urbanization; this includes support from UN agencies, international and regional partners as well as the private sector. Such solutions will empower African cities to generate economic growth and address the growing inequalities across the continent.

The rural-urban linkage is distinctive in Africa and the strong existing links must be factored into the overall structural transformation to ensure that development efforts are focused on both rural and urban areas; which is a significant measure to mitigate the proliferation of urban slums and slum dwellers that constitutes up to 70% of the urban population. Poverty and urban inequalities in African cities remain close to the highest in the world, with vulnerable populations and marginalized groups, especially women and youth, greatly affected by the complex challenges associated with rapid urban growth. Experience shows, however, that a combination of providing equitable and better services alongside adequate mobility can effectively address the issues stemming from the widening rural-urban divide and contribute to effectively manage urban growth. Africa's rural exodus that is partly due to issues related to peace and security challenges must also be factored into the way forward in addressing urbanization challenges and opportunities in the continent.

Most importantly, decentralization coupled with strong local governance mechanisms is fundamental to the process of sustainable urbanization in Africa. National, local and regional governments in order to support sustainable urbanization must work alongside one another to create new models of multi-level governance to ensure the full implementation of development initiatives. For example, the government of Ghana has implemented policies on decentralization and local governments as well as established a national urban forum where state and non-state actors meet to discuss issues in urbanization and devise integrated policies and solutions to the complex challenges of urbanization. Governance institutions must aim to ensure adequate resources are given to local authorities to curtail the development of



informalities and empower local governments to make strategic investment in basic services to achieve universal access to development for all. Furthermore, urban policy in Africa must be people-centred in order to reflect the various needs of its citizens to further achieve the common goal of constructing inclusive and sustainable cities.

A common position for Africa's urban future is further championed through the Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and in Africa's long-term Agenda 2063 transformative vision. The six pillars of the Common African Position, at their essence, address the core challenges of sustainable urbanization, including structural economic transformation, people-centred development, environmental sustainability, and finance and partnerships. Overall, the particularity and specific needs of Africa in the process of urbanization must be recognized and adequately addressed, throughout the process of developing the post-2015 development agenda.