



## UNCRD and UN-HABITAT Forum for Mayors and Senior Urban Officials on Sustainable Urban Development and Management in Africa

*Aide-Memoire*

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### **Background**

Africa is the fastest urbanizing continent with an estimated growth rate of 3.4 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Africa's cities and urban centres 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

Cities are the agents of economic, social, cultural, technologic and political changes and advancement<sup>4</sup>. Rapid urbanization has not only changed Africa's landscape but has also generated formidable challenges to national and city governments, especially in the areas of governance, socio-economic capacity, planning, mobility and the general environment. The urban economic growth in these countries has largely been mirrored by increasing levels of urban poverty, inequality, inefficiency and the concomitant impacts on vital renewable and non-renewable natural resources. Despite the implications of this rapid urban growth, most urban governments lack the capacity to deal with these challenges.

The outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development - Rio+20, recognized the need for a holistic approach to urban development. The outcome document, *The Future We Want* notes that, if well planned and managed, cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies. The need to promote an integrated approach to planning and developing and managing sustainable cities and urban settlements; promotion of sustainable development policies that support inclusive housing and social services and a safe and healthy living environment for all are also emphasized. To achieve this, the important role of municipal and local governments in setting a vision for sustainable cities and active involvement of all relevant United Nation entities is also highlighted.

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<sup>1</sup>UN-Habitat and UNEP(2010) *The State of African Cities 2010: Governance, Inequality and Urban Land Markets*, UN-Habitat, Nairobi, Kenya.

<sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>UN-Habitat and UNEP (2010).

<sup>4</sup>UN-Habitat (2011), *The Economic Role of Cities*, UN-Habitat, Nairobi, Kenya.

Urban managers and policymakers in Africa need to swiftly act and steer the urbanization process from its current unsustainable path to cities that promote a harmonious and friendly environment, have safe and livable neighborhoods with high quality services, and encourage public participation in their governance. The inability of most urban leaders to develop better and harmonious cities that respond to the expectations of the citizens has largely to do with lack of the necessary skills and professional capacities to leverage resources and to formulate and implement forward-looking strategies and policies towards sustainable urban development.

The Shanghai Manual emanated from the 2010 Shanghai World Expo and was developed by the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) of UNDESA, in collaboration with the City of Shanghai and in cooperation with a number of United Nations (UN) agencies and international/national organizations. The Manual intends to serve as a practical guidance tool to mayors, urban planners and decision-makers of rapidly growing cities in developing countries. UNCRD has been requested by DSD to use this manual in its seminars and forums for mayors and senior city managers.

UNCRD Africa Office, in partnership with UN-HABITAT Centre for Cities, will organize a “Forum for Mayors and Senior Urban Officials on Sustainable Urban Development and Management in Africa” from 27-29 November in Nairobi, Kenya. This is the second of such forums that UNCRD is conducting and the first one in Africa. The first one was conducted in Nagoya for mayors and senior managers for Asian cities.

## **Urbanization Challenges in Africa**

Urbanization in Africa presents both opportunities and challenges to the continent. Cities are hubs for ideas, commerce, culture, science, productivity, social development and much more. At their best, cities have enabled people to advance socially and economically. Concentration of people in urban areas facilitates provision of education, health care and other social services. Energy and natural resources are conserved since people living in densely-populated cities use substantially less land, energy and water per person than people with comparable incomes in suburban or rural areas. However, providing for millions of urban residents with essential services requires vast investments, skilled management and innovative leadership. Inadequate management capacities of African cities continue to pose serious urban development challenges, key among them being what the World Bank referred to as “urbanization without growth”, unplanned settlements, slums and shanty towns, etc.

### *Urban Poverty*

As cities grow in size, they become more complex, and the ability to manage them becomes a daunting challenge. 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 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.

### *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.<sup>5</sup> 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

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<sup>5</sup>York, S. (2012) *Africa: Green Cities & the Challenges of Urbanization*, in <http://populationgrowth.org/africa-green-cities-the-challenges-of-urbanization/>

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 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 Transport Management*

Although the challenge of urban transportation in African cities has long been with us, the situation is getting worse by the day. 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.

Declining urban densities associated with sprawl, combined with weak, fragmented, 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, often affecting the poor and excluding them from work and social services. 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. African urban managers must move quickly and come up with improved models to coordinate planning, regulation, licensing, inspections, monitoring and enforcement of urban public transport.

## **Rationale for the Mayors' and Senior Urban Officials' Seminar**

Despite the challenges highlighted, African mayors and senior urban officials are charged with the responsibility of steering their cities from the current unsustainable path towards better, friendly and

livable cities. It is however apparent that many city governments in Africa are simply not prepared to cope with the complexity and the speed at which urbanization is occurring. The lack of skilled management practices condemns the cities into centres of poverty, decay, gridlock, crime, urban sprawl, slums and pollution.

However, using the wealth of knowledge, real-life experiences and innovative models of urban development gleaned from all over the world as analyzed in the Shanghai Manual for Better Cities, African cities could 'leapfrog' from their urban development challenges to fostering sustainable, livable and harmonious cities.

To help achieve the urgent need to improve urban planning, management and livability in African cities, UNCRD Africa Office, in partnership with UN-HABITAT Centre for Cities, will support African mayors and senior urban officials to implement many of the social, environmental and economic goals and objectives that were highlighted at the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai, China as well as those agreed at Rio+20. Drawing on issues highlighted in the Shanghai Manual and *The Future We Want*, UNCRD Africa Office, in partnership with UN-HABITAT Centre for Cities, will organize a Forum for African mayors and senior urban officials on sustainable urban development and management.

## **Objectives**

The objective of the Forum will be to enhance the capacities of African mayors and senior city officials in planning and implementing an integrated set of policies and measures to meet challenges of sustainable urban development and poverty reduction within the context of the outcomes of Rio+20.

Using innovative ideas and practical solutions that have been successfully applied in other cities, the Forum will expose African mayors and senior officials to a menu of different policy options available in solving urban challenges, as well as measures that may be relevant to their respective cities through peer learning and experiences from other cities and regions.

Specifically the Forum will aim at:

- Sensitizing mayors and senior officials on effective urban management and governance practices and approaches for implementing, monitoring and evaluating the provision of public services in cities and urban regions;
- Examining how to ensure balanced economic growth that appreciates urban-rural linkages;
- Exposing the participants to the power of using Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) to enhance cities' productivity, management and service delivery;
- Introducing the participants to protection and adoption of diverse urban cultural heritage towards achieving sustainable urban development;
- Examining responsibilities of mayors and senior officials towards sustainable urban environmental protection and management, and reducing ecological impacts of urbanization;
- Sensitizing mayors and senior city officials on how to promote scientific and technological innovations towards effective and sustainable urban transport so as to improve the people's quality of life and their productivity.

## Outputs and Achievements

The Forum will help African mayors and city planners to come up with a menu of policy options to address urban development challenges affecting their cities and also improve their expertise towards their implementation.

Specific outputs for the Forum include:

- Improved capacity of the African mayors and senior city officials towards developing and maintaining a cohesive vision and plans for their cities to ensure sustainability;
- Improved capacity of the city mayors and senior city officials to provide urban services to the city residents;
- African mayors and senior city officials will be able to integrate environmental protection issues into urban planning and management;
- Strengthened capacity of the African mayors and senior city officials towards embracing and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for urban management and services delivery;
- Mayors and senior city officials will be able to identify the different options they can exploit towards transforming their city's economy;
- City mayors and senior city officials will be able to design policies that allow the use of science and technology, and which fosters linkages and innovations within their cities;
- Capacity of the mayors and senior city officials to powerfully influence the expression of culture and to explore its potential in achieving sustainable local economic development will be improved;
- Strengthened capacity of the mayors and senior city officials to comprehensively plan, implement and manage sustainable urban transport systems.

## Participating Countries

About 16 mayors and senior city officials from Botswana, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe will attend the Forum. The organizers will also invite relevant scholars and policymakers from other countries and regions to share their innovative experiences in managing their cities.

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