

TOWARDS AN AFRICA URBAN AGENDA



UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

 United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

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We aspire that, by 2063, Africa shall be a prosperous continent with the means and resources to drive its own development, and where African people have a high standard of living and quality of life, sound health and well-being; Well educated citizens and skills revolution underpinned by science, technology and innovation for a knowledge society; Cities and other settlements are hubs of cultural and economic activities, with modernized infrastructure, and people have access to all the basic necessities of life including shelter, water, sanitation, energy, public transport and ICT; Economies are structurally transformed to create shared growth, decent jobs and economic opportunities for all... (Agenda 2063 - The Africa We Want)

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UN-HABITAT FOREWORD



Africa is now at an impressive stage of transformation witnessing rapid wealth generation. This is manifested in the high growth of GDP in many countries and linked to the significant growth in urbanization that goes hand in hand. While Africa is still the

least urbanized continent, its urbanization rates are higher than anywhere else in the world. These parallel evolutions – the growth of GDP and growth of urbanization – present a unique opportunity to review the African urban growth pattern so that over the next three to five decades, urbanization can be properly guided as a driver of sustainable development. The alternative to planned urbanization is a chaotic evolution of towns and cities that will be a hindrance to prosperity and social integration. In the last two decades, there has been a growing professional consensus on the role of sustainable urbanization as a tool for development. Studies and findings from Economic Geography from the 1990s provide consistent scientific evidence of this correlation (World Bank, 2009).

The nature of Africa's economic growth till date has been mostly based on the primary sector of the economy (extractive industries and agriculture). The expected next step of substantive development will be a progressive shift towards more productive sectors of the economy, mainly industrial manufacturing (secondary sector) and services (tertiary sector). The main vehicle for this sectoral transition is urbanization which changes the structural compositions of all sizes of cities, from the large cities to the rural villages. When this transition is properly managed it tends to yield the expected development

outcomes such as productivity increases, rising employment and income resulting from skilled activities in industry and services, yielding increased prosperity and higher quality of life. The capacity of urbanization to generate wealth is greatly determined by the quality of its design, stemming from the fact that urbanization is a social and community endeavor.

Although Africa currently faces urban challenges, it has, more importantly, an immense opportunity of directing urbanization towards a model conducive to prosperity, employment and social well-being. There have been examples of huge urbanization processes, as illustrated with the case of China, where the role of urbanization in fostering development has been clearly demonstrated. However, the Chinese model has not been able to effectively address the environmental dimensions of urbanization. The objective of the United Nations, stated in the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 11 - to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable - advocates for a balance between the three pillars of sustainable development; economic, social and environmental, towards a prosperous society.

In today's African reality where there is still much development needed, the role of efficient urbanization as a tool for development holds unprecedented potential. In most of the analysis of African development there is a lack of in-depth attention to the role of urbanization as a tool for economic growth. Most of the analysis focus on the ailments of urbanization but not on transforming urbanization into a tool for a successful development strategy. This one-sided approach has promoted ad hoc and partial interventions in detriment of a strategic vision that will increase the advantages of urbanization.

To foster a more sustainable urbanization model in Africa, some changes of approach are required. At national government level, there is a need to clearly state the rules of the game country-wide in order to mobilize society, stakeholders, the private sector and foreign investment in the process. A National Urban Policy can be a good tool for framing the debate, and build consensus and strategies that can deliver a level playing field to unleash the opportunities presented by urbanization. At the local level, there is a need to focus the strategic interventions in a pragmatic manner in order to address the local specificities on rules and regulations, urban design and financial design conducive to planned city extensions and other tools that can yield the expected wealth derived from planned urbanization.

The urban transformation that UN-Habitat foresees for Africa demands in depth consideration of its legal framework, its urban design and its financial plan. In some countries, there may be no need for more legislation but for existing legislation to be consistently applied. Special attention is required in urban planning because the current analysis of urbanization shows an insufficient allocation of land for common spaces and services, severely undermining the economic value of buildable plots and contributing to the continent-wide issue of urban congestion. Equally important is the need to focus on the financial design as in general, the value that urbanization

efforts of African Ministers in charge of Housing and Urban Development over the past decades. They have articulated a shared view towards Habitat III, through the sessions of the African Ministerial Conference of Housing and Urban Development and in other fora, integrating productive urbanization within the core pillars of Agenda 2063, for Africa's structural transformation.

In this context, UN-Habitat is actively supporting the Africa Urban Agenda Programme in close cooperation with Member States. This cooperation has sought to coordinate urban actors in Africa and support systematic urban policy formulation, advocacy, and implementation and monitoring leading up to Habitat III in 2016. I commend the process of citizens' participation that many African countries are engaging in, through National Urban Forums, National Habitat Committees and preparation of National Habitat III Reports, which, in both bottom-up and top-down processes, seeks to deepen the ownership of the transformative and people-centered Africa Urban Agenda.

UN-Habitat's partnership with UNECA to link these processes with the macro-economic planning and feed them into regional integration is much commended and give all of us much hope and energy for Africa's urban transformation.

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