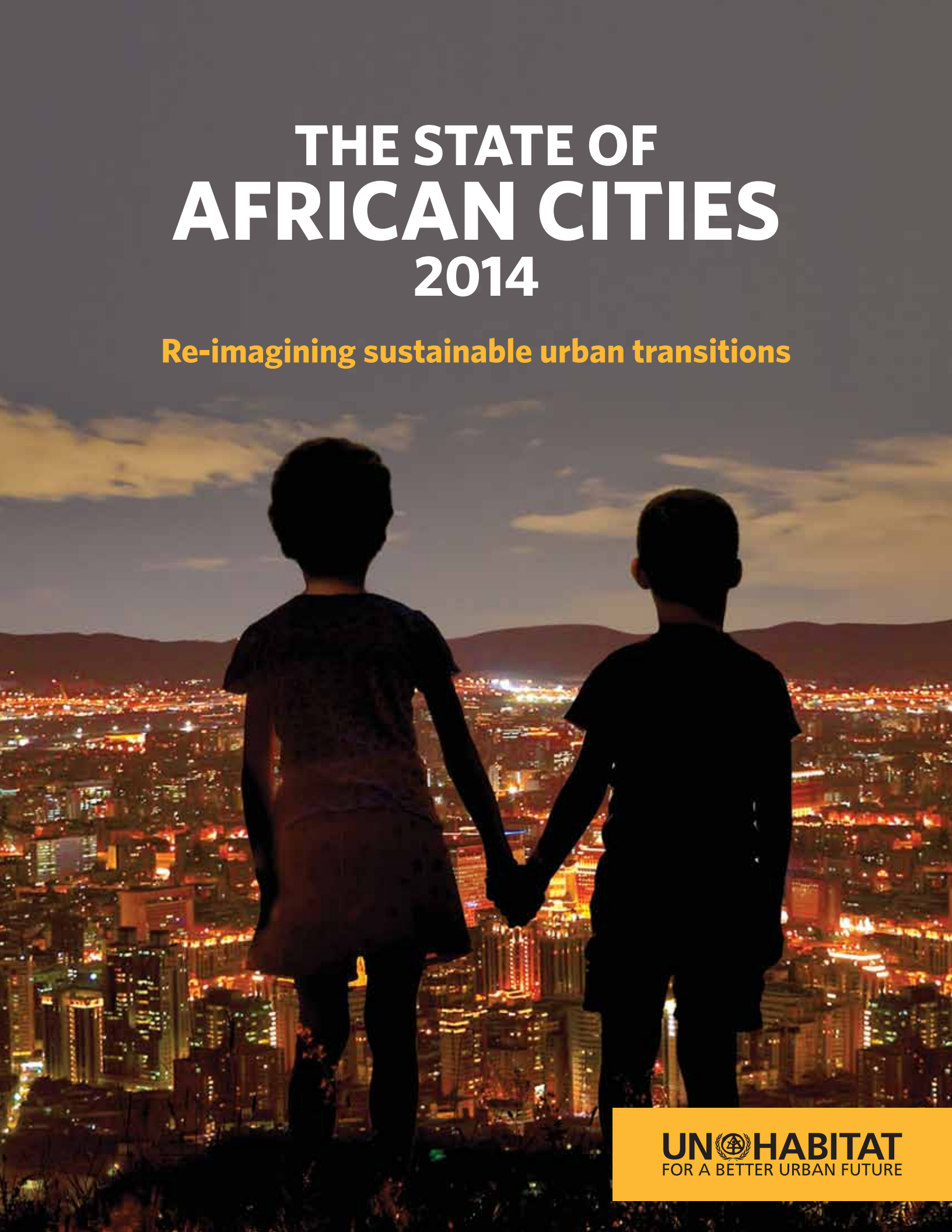
THE STATE OF AFRICAN CITIES 2014

Re-imagining sustainable urban transitions



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THE STATE OF AFRICAN CITIES 2014

Re-imagining sustainable urban transitions

ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability

UCLG AFRICA
United Cities and Local Governments of Africa
Cités et Gouvernements Locaux Unis d'Afrique
CGLU AFRIQUE

Foreword by UN-Habitat

It gives me great pleasure to present *The State of African Cities 2014: Re-imagining sustainable urban transitions* - the third publication on Africa in UN-Habitat's rapidly-expanding regional State of the Cities report series.

The first African regional report (2008): '*A framework for addressing urbanization challenges*' provided a general overview of housing and management conditions in African cities and set information benchmarks on city level data and trends. The second publication (2010): '*Governance, inequalities and urban land markets*', expanded the baseline views of the 2008 report, analyzing urban governance modalities in the light of newly-emerging urban spatial configurations, exposing inequality in African cities and examining how African urban dwellers access land.

This third State of African Cities report was realized in close cooperation with ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability - Africa and United Cities and Local Governments Africa (UCLGA). It attempts to take analysis to a next level in the context of the globally changing conditions. It seeks to stimulate discussion on the need for radically different, re-imagined development visions to guide sustainable urban and other transitions in Africa over the decades to come.

African cities are often analyzed from a perspective that sees urbanism and urban living as progressing towards the example set by Western paradigms. But the conditions and circumstances that prevailed in the world's industrialized societies during the 20th century - and which shaped their cities' form and function - are no longer the same in today's world. Global climate and environmental change, as well as increasing awareness of water, food or energy insecurities, for instance, are now starting to shape our understanding of the dire need for new visions on what good urban management for the 21st century entails.

The overarching challenge for Africa in the decades to come is massive population growth in a context of wide-spread poverty that, in combination, generate complex and inter-related threats to the human habitat. The main premise of this report is that successfully and effectively addressing the vulnerabilities and risks to which the African populations are increasingly being exposed may, perhaps, require a complete re-thinking of current urban development trajectories if sustainable transitions are to be achieved.

Urban development decisions typically involve vast capital layouts and, consequently, can lock cities or even entire countries in a particular development path. In other words: today's decisions and interventions fix the parameters into a particular development direction for decades. Given the comparatively late onset of the urban transition in Africa, however, there exist real opportunities for embracing new urban paradigms that are more conducive to both the present and long-term needs of African cities and nations.

Greener solutions, climate change adaptations, vulnerability reduction, technological innovation, urbanization and the economic development of African cities all go hand in hand in this context. Whereas a 're-imagined African urbanism' would undoubtedly embrace some parts of the 'Western urban model', Africa now has an opportunity to also seek policy and strategic directions that incorporate long-term sustainability for social, environmental and economic development that will better deliver than the imported urban paradigms have done so far.

This report, however, does not give ready-made solutions. Cities are simply too individual and specific in their needs and vulnerabilities for standardized solutions. Rather, the current report analyses the emerging challenges and risks to which urban and rural Africa are being exposed with a view to facilitating discussions at regional, national and local levels on how best to address the challenges ahead and apply solutions that are innovative, location-specific and effective. Not a single African city today is exempted from distinct and often multiple vulnerabilities. Careful consideration of the intervention options available and, indeed, the courage to embark on a 're-imagined African urbanism' is what is called for in this report.

One thing is of particular importance in this context. Cities are not stand-alone entities. They are all part and parcel of often shared geographical, social, environmental and political contexts. Given that many of the challenges ahead are of a trans-boundary nature, this report seeks to stimulate local, national and regional cooperation among African cities and nations to re-imagine shared approaches to urban development and capture the most effective interventions to facilitate sustainable urban and other transitions in Africa.

Joan Clos
Under-Secretary General, United Nations
Executive Director, UN-Habitat

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Executive Summary

Nelson Mandela Bridge, Johannesburg, South Africa. **©Ehrman Photographic/Shutterstock.**

The current report is the third in The State of African Cities series. The first, *The State of African Cities 2008: A framework for addressing urban challenges in Africa*, was explorative and analyzed general urban conditions and trends and identified benchmarks. It drew the attention to population strata; as well as limited options for the poorer Africans to access urban land, all contributed to urban slum proliferation and would continue to do so, unless vigorously tackled. The 2010 report further showed that guiding urban growth in Africa will require the establishment of realistic and

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