

QUICK
GUIDES
FOR
POLICY
MAKERS



housing the **poor** in African cities

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Cities Alliance
CITIES WITHOUT SLUMS

8

LOCAL GOVERNMENT:
ADDRESSING URBAN CHALLENGES IN A
PARTICIPATORY AND INTEGRATED WAY

Quick Guide 8: Local Government

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HS Number: HS/186/10E
ISBN Number: (Volume) 978-92-1-132323-8
ISBN Number (Series): 978-92-1-131926-2

Cover photos ©: A Grimard

The publication of the Housing the Poor in African Cities series was made possible through the financial support of Cities Alliance.

Published by
United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)
Training and Capacity Building Branch (TCBB)
E-mail: tcbb@unhabitat.org
Printing and Prepress: UNON/Publishing Services Section/Nairobi, ISO 14001:2004-certified

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This series of Quick Guides has been inspired by and prepared on the basis of a similar series on Housing the Poor in Asian Cities, which was published jointly by UN-HABITAT and UNESCAP in 2009. The series is the adaptation of the Asian version to the realities and contexts of the sub-Saharan African countries, and will be available in English, French and Portuguese. This has been made possible through the financial contributions of Cities Alliance and UN-HABITAT.

The guides have been written by the team of experts from the African Centre for Cities (ACC) led by Edgar Pieterse, with the substantive contributions of Karen Press, Kecia Rust and Warren Smit. The experts in the team who have contributed to invaluable background reports for the guides are: Sarah Charlton, Firoz Khan, Caroline Kihato, Michael Kihato, Melinda Silverman and Tanya Zack. Project management support was provided by Bruce Frayne, and design by Tau Tavengwa. A number of colleagues from UN-HABITAT's Training and Capacity Building branch, Shelter branch, and the Regional Office for Africa and Arab States, have contributed to the design, development, and review of the guides. They include Gulelat Kebede, Cynthia Radert, Claudio Acioly, Jean D'Aragon, Rasmus Precht, Christophe Lalande, Remy Sietchiping and Alain Grimard. The guides have benefited from the contributions made by a range of experts who participated in the Expert Group Meeting held in November 2009 in Nairobi, Kenya: Benjamin Bradlow, Malick Gaye, Serge Allou, Barbra Kohlo, Ardelline Masinde, Esther Kodhek, Jack Makau, Allain Cain, Sylvia Noagbesenu, Kecia Rust, Babar Mumtaz, Alain Durand Lasserre, Alan Gilbert and Tarek El-Sheik.

All these contributions have shaped the Quick Guides series, which we hope will contribute to the daily work of policy makers in the sub-Saharan Africa region in their quest to improve housing and access to land for the urban poor.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT: ADDRESSING URBAN CHALLENGES IN A PARTICIPATORY AND INTEGRATED WAY

QUICK GUIDE FOR POLICY MAKERS NUMBER 8

Local government has an important role to play in ensuring that all residents of African cities get access to conveniently situated land, services, adequate housing and the benefits of urban life. Even with resources and capacity constraints, local governments can significantly improve the lives of residents through participatory and integrated interventions.

This guide begins by providing a brief overview of local government in Africa, and the urban challenges (and opportunities) that local government bodies need to respond to. Two key approaches in responding to these challenges and opportunities, and particularly to those that involve human settlements issues, are then introduced: participatory planning and an integrated/ holistic approach to urban development. The guide argues that physical development, economic development and social development need to go hand-in-hand in order for interventions to be effective and sustainable. Some key tools for local governments to use when adopting these approaches are presented, including mobilizing greater financial resources, entering into partnerships with community organizations (and other stakeholders), and the formulation and implementation of holistic city-wide human settlements strategies.

Through developing holistic strategies in a participatory way, entering into partnerships to extend capacity for delivery, and mobilizing additional resources, local governments can ensure that, over time, fewer and fewer households live in inadequate conditions, and, ultimately, that housing and other living conditions for all residents progressively improve. Throughout, it is crucial that urban residents have the space to participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of these strategies.

This guide is not aimed at specialists, but aims to help build the capacities of national and local government officials and policy makers who need to quickly enhance their understanding of low-income housing issues.

URBAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN AFRICA

Local governments in Africa generally have severe capacity and resources constraints, for example in terms of staff and finances, and they face major challenges in fulfilling their role as part of an organized system of collective action (involving the individual, institutional, public and private spheres) in the management of the locality's common affairs. It is critical, however, that local governments in Africa be enabled to become key actors in good urban governance – by means of a continuous process, in which different interests are accommodated – if we aim to ensure that all residents of African cities can get access to conveniently situated land, services, adequate housing and the benefits of urban life. Many local government bodies in Africa have managed to tackle their urban challenges successfully through being innovative, and willing to engage with other key stakeholders such as civil society. There has also been significant transformation of local government in Africa in recent decades, with an emphasis on decentralization, combined with corporatisation/privatisation and partnerships with various actors, including communities.



Colonial and post-independence local government

In most of Africa, urban local government is based on the local government systems established during the colonial era. In the francophone countries of Africa, for example, urban government was established on the French model. The largest cities had elected councils and elected mayors, and were responsible for a significant range of local services. However, immediately on independence, the national governments of countries such as Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire took over control of the largest cities, explicitly because of their financial insolvency and administrative incompetence, but implicitly in order to establish control over potential political opposition¹. Similarly, in anglophone Africa, elected local councils had been put in place by the end of the colonial period, but their performance fell far short of their responsibilities and growing demands, and their political autonomy and fiscal base were progressively eroded during the 1960s and 1970s. Central governments generally failed to give local government adequate funds or revenue-raising powers, or to ensure that they had sufficient decision-making powers and trained staff to address the urban challenges they faced.² For example, local government was abolished in the early 1970s in Tanzania and replaced by direct central government administration (with some decentralisation to regions).

By the 1980s, many national governments were beginning to recognize the importance of local municipal government. Local government was re-established in many countries. In Tanzania, the re-establishment of local government was a direct response

to a number of failures in the direct administration system, including the outbreak of cholera in urban areas.³ In certain countries the importance of metropolitan government was also recognized, resulting in the establishment of the City of Abidjan in 1980, and a similar body for Dakar in 1983.

In lusophone countries, notably Angola and Mozambique, there was no colonial tradition of elected local government, and several decades of conflict delayed the decentralization reforms that had occurred in the rest of Africa. There has more recently been some move toward the creation of democratic local government, for example the

introduction of elected local government structures in Mozambique for the first time in the 1990s.

Increasingly, governments and international agencies recognized that improved urban management, decentralization and local democracy are interlinked, and during the 1990s there were fresh attempts at decentralization to local government level, linked to state democratization. However, the decentralization of responsibilities to local government was seldom accompanied by the transfer of the resources needed to effectively undertake these responsibilities.⁴

DIFFERENCES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The status, powers and functions of local government vary considerably across Africa. The nature of local government bodies can range from democratically elected local governments with a variety of income sources and responsibility for delivering a wide range of services, to appointed local governments that depend on national government for revenue and which have only limited responsibilities.

Somalia, for example, represents a continuum of different types of local government bodies:⁵

In Egypt, on the other hand, elected and appointed authorities co-exist, in a parallel and linked hierarchy of appointed officials and elected popular councils.⁶

In some cases there are different levels of local government, for example two-tier metropolitan government, as in Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire.

Only in a few countries (e.g. South Africa and Namibia) is local government enshrined in the constitution. In most countries local government is created by central govern-

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