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André Loeckx, Kelly Shannon, Rafael Tuts, Han Verschure (eds.)

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Urban Trialogues
visions, projects, co-productions
Localising Agenda 21
ISBN 92-1-131709-6
HS/727/04E

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Foreword

Since the adoption of Agenda 21 in 1992, cities have moved to the forefront of socio-economic change and sustainable development. Half of the world's population is now living in cities and urban settlements, while the other half is increasingly dependent on cities and towns for their economic survival and livelihood. Cities have become centres of innovation and engines of development. It is now generally understood that cities are the key to social and economic advancement and environmental improvement.

But in contrast to their promise, many cities — especially in the developing world — represent today the most alarming concentrations of poverty. The pace of urbanisation is simply too fast to provide and manage basic services for all. In the process, first and foremost the urban poor are marginalised. It is estimated that there are about one billion urban dwellers living without adequate shelter and basic services, in life-threatening conditions of deprivation and environmental degradation. This number is expected to double by 2025.

Against this bleak scenario, it is encouraging to note that over the past decade more than 6,400 local governments in 113 countries have responded actively to the call to engage in Local Agenda 21 processes with their communities. This is a major

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