SESSION OF THE AFRICAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT - AMCHUD IV

TERRITORIAL PLANNING AND BASIC SERVICES IN AFRICA

OPTIMISING THE URBAN ADVANTAGE
“Where we are – Where we Need to Go” --
Advancing a New Pact Towards Habitat III
INTRODUCTION

Towards a Transformation of Africa’s Urban Development Agenda

African urbanization is entering a critical phase at which the growth momentum presents an opportunity for accelerating national development and for creating the foundation of a sustainable urban future. The dynamism which African cities are exhibiting today with respect to a higher contribution in the value creation chain, increasing productivity, fostering innovation, and optimizing infrastructure investment, provides an important lever for change. As the urban population almost doubles in the next two decades the imperative of steering and guiding the growth process – through urban planning - becomes a priority undertaking. Equally urgent is the need to improve livability and increase productivity of the city through expanding access to basic services. Indeed, Africa’s increased urban population is a powerful asset for the Continent’s overall transformation. However, it can only attain its full potential when cities are properly planned and adequately serviced.

Central government plays a leading role in guiding and steering urban development. Through their standing platform of AMCHUD, African Ministers have exchanged experiences, jointly explored possibilities for action and, in the last 7 years, adopted declarations, frameworks, action plans, and strategies for guiding and steering the Continent’s urban development. Many of the overall areas of agreement are increasingly being implemented by respective governments even if mechanisms for collectively sharing information on follow-up have not worked effectively. The voice of Africa is also being heard in forums which deliberate on issues of global concern.

The thrust of AMCHUD’s engagement throughout its seven years existence has been to tackle the African urban challenge as it manifests itself in the dimensions of growth, poverty, sustainability, governance, and also recognizing the role which cities are playing as engines of development.

This ‘strategy document’ appreciates the importance of those challenges. However, it takes an additional step of encouraging a review of the overall direction that urban development in Africa is taking in the new millennium. It suggests that embedded within the current trajectory of urban development are distortions which will continuously impair all the efforts that are being made and hinder the achievement of desired goals. A major change is needed in the course of Africa’s urban development – a shift whose main thrust can be propelled by, first, a re-examination of the planning process and the delivery of basic services.

This ‘strategy document’ begins by highlighting the prevailing opportunities and also some of the challenges to be overcome in reorienting the Continent’s urban development trajectory. It concludes by proposing a shared ‘pact’ whose elements Ministers can consider to adopt in the pursuit of an urban transformation agenda, driven by the planning process which will enhance the capacity to increase access to basic services.
OPPORTUNITIES

In less than 8 years the urban population of Africa will be larger than Europe

It is only one century ago or so that the urban population in Africa was less than 8 percent of the total population. A surprising fact of urbanization in Africa is that in less than 8 years its urban population will be larger than the total urban population of Europe (569 vs. 553 million people in 2020). It will be also larger than the urban population of Latin America and the Caribbean (533 million), the first region to become predominantly urban in the developing world.¹

This critical mass of people in urban areas represents a great opportunity.

Many things have changed and some of them in a positive way.

At the end of the 20th Century Africa was 35 percent urban.

Life expectancy has increased from 24 years in 1900 to 52 years at the end of the century. Education has spread, and in recent years literacy rates in Sub-Saharan Africa have tripled from 23 percent in 1970 to 65 percent in 2010.² GDP per capita increased from 585 (1990 International Dollars) in 1913 to 1,368 in 1998.³ Recently, there are visible improvements in basic services, transport infrastructure and communication technologies in numerous African cities.

Today Africa is 41 percent urban.

Africa experienced the highest economic growth among all regions in the world

Despite the turbulent global economic environment in recent years, growth in Sub-Saharan Africa remained robust at around 5 percent in 2011. Excluding South Africa, which accounts for over a third of the region’s GDP, growth in the rest of the region was even stronger at 5.9 percent in 2011, making it one of the fastest growing developing regions in the world.⁴

As countries urbanize economic growth increases.

Although urbanization and economic growth has not gone hand by hand in Africa, still the relationship between level of urbanization and GDP per capita from 1960 to 2010 is positive (with a moderate correlation).

Low income countries have a very low level of urbanization, concomitantly; high income economies are highly urbanized.

This means that as African countries urbanize they become more prosperous.

Higher prospects of urbanization = higher prospects of development

The global urban transition currently being experienced is inevitable, irreversible and positive in many respects. With an annual growth rate of 3.36 per cent per year from 2005 to 2010, African urban areas grew 1.7 times faster than the urban growth rate of the world in the same years. The high growth rate means that some cities will double their population in 15 years, and some others even in a shorter period.

Urbanization is one of the defining features of the 21st century. Urbanization in Africa is providing vital opportunities for positive economic development such as industrialization and entry into export markets, as well as social and human advancement. Cities generate economies of agglomeration that are important to sustain economic growth and generate jobs and opportunities. Cities are also attracting national and foreign investments …

Increased and better coordination of different levels of government

Central governments are increasingly appreciating that they need to work closely with local governments and other actors. Successful experiences show that new forms of multilevel governance are bringing positive results. Cities displaying higher entrepreneurship have more chances to succeed if they manage to be part of regional and national development strategies. They can mobilize more financial resources and integrate other development actors at national and international levels. National governments are also initiating decentralization measures working with active and creative regional and local authorities and also creating better outcomes with higher social
CHALLENGES

Severe Backlogs in the Provision of Urban Basic Services

Despite commitments made by African governments over the last 50 years to improve basic service delivery, latest assessments indicate that the continent suffers from a severe backlog in the provision of urban basic services to the extent that it will not meet the minimum targets of the Millennium Development Goals. And even more challenging is that, if no urgent remedial action is taken, the situation can further deteriorate due to the rapid rate at which demand for services and the cost for delivery are both rising.

Urban Planning: Solving Problems or Creating More?

It is reckoned that among the major factors contributing to the above situation has been the manner in which territorial and urban planning is implemented. The underpinning principles, operational modalities and the overall institutional settings have contributed to impairing the capacity of governments in Africa to increase access to basic services, improve quality of delivery, generate prosperity, and ensure overall sustainability. An urgent challenge, therefore, is how to rectify the inherent distortions in urban planning, particularly in the context of climate change.

A Tendency Towards Promoting Urban Sprawl

Most African cities are growing in a discontinuous, scattered and low density form that is not sustainable. Due to the lack of appropriate urban planning, cities are expanding to endless peripheries with very low residential densities. A recently published comprehensive study has revealed that overall densities in African cities are progressively declining. If the current trend is left to continue, by 2030 the majority of African urban centres will have doubled their spatial areas. The implications of urban sprawl to modality of service delivery are significant. Extended distances increase investment as well as operational costs. A lower density reduces economies of scale and generates inefficiencies. Indeed a number of technical complications are encountered when services have to be delivered to non-optimum thresholds.

Adopting Very Rigid Zoning

Where inefficiency in service delivery exists, it is often compounded by the continuity in the inherited tradition of rigid zoning as a major feature of urban planning. The inflexible separation of land-use functions not only fragments the African city, but more seriously, it creates a severe strain on infrastructure and service delivery. In the area of transport, for instance, zoning promotes inefficient movements in search of dispersed services and oftentimes causes congestion in the transport systems. Zoning also increases costs of trunk infrastructure by stretching the connections between reticulated networks.

Inadequate Utilization of Public Spaces and Neglect of the Street

Inadequate attention granted to the design and management of public spaces further compounds the situation. Master plans and neighborhood lay-out do allocate spaces for public facilities such as markets, schools, hospitals, police stations, as well as parks and stadiums. The tendency often times has been to treat these simply as ‘sites’ without integrating them fully in the day-to-day living and livelihood generation of the targeted urban communities. One of the more serious aspects, has been the insufficient attention given to the level of the street in African urban planning. The street is the foundation of the city and its unifying element. It is the underpinning of the ‘urban layout’, which is needed to create a hierarchy of order and the structure of urban space. The ‘urban layout’ guides urban development and ensures better connectivity. Unfortunately, in most of the urban plans the street has degenerated into a vehicular axis to be designed only with reference to volume of motor traffic. The role of the street as the transmitter of services is often not fully incorporated in African urban planning; even less, its role as a social and cultural value.

Reactive Planning

It was stated above that the demographics of African urbanization present a dynamic opportunity for urban development in the Continent. The anticipated three quarter of a billion population size can only become a propelling factor for development if strategic measures are taken to preempt the inherent challenges such a rapid growth present. However, today most African cities are implementing reactive policies and actions to interventions generated by real estate developers and informal builders. Few cities are planning at the scale or the problems they are facing. In most cases their interventions are symbolic and micro and not commensurate with the magnitude of the urban challenges.

Planning, Infrastructure Development and Service Delivery are Disconnected

In many African countries and cities there is a lack of clear linkage between urban land-use planning, infrastructure investment and service delivery. Most urban plans have not been linked to major infrastructural investment programmes including super highways, industrial parks, power networks, modern waste water treatment and even neighborhoods revitalization programmes such as slum improvements. Despite laudable efforts, many interventions have not generated optimum outcomes due to lack of proper linkages and synchronization among these components. For example, it has not been uncommon for major investments in the transport sector to neglect the needs of pedestrians, cyclists or even mass transit. Even in cases where projects have worked following an ‘integrated service delivery approach’, proposed solutions have not managed to overcome the major problem of institutional fragmentation and sectoral demarcation in the management of service delivery.
Poorly Integrating the Climate Change Factor

Although some countries and cities are making efforts to integrate climate change aspects in the development agenda, efforts are still limited and not systematically integrated in planning tools and related investments. Cutting across all the above challenges is the impact of Climate change. This much discussed phenomenon not only generates an exponential magnification of the demand for services (increased influx of migrants from rural areas - environmental refugees; excessive strain on traditional infrastructure; increased shortages and hazards; increased epidemics; breakdown in security due to increased conflict over resources) but also necessitates more sustainable modes of delivering services.
THE WAY FORWARD

1. Developing a Transformative National Urban Policy

Ministers attending this IVth AMCHUD Conference may wish to consider, depending on their national contexts, to review or develop their National Urban Policies with a view to emphasize that urbanization is a positive and transformative process and not only a transitional process. A National Policy acknowledging the power of urbanization to propel and guide national economic growth and reduce poverty both in urban and rural areas; a Policy that promotes a more optimistic perspective about the city, confronting the negative perception of urbanization. It is transformative because it recognizes that urbanization can make countries more advanced, developed and richer, generating higher levels of prosperity for all. Of course, this entails a well-planned and well-organized urbanization process.

UN-Habitat can work with countries to prepare such a National Urban Policy that can reassert the role of cities and towns in national development. This will contribute to maximizing cities’ and regions’ strategic positions, and in some cases to recreating new comparative advantages that can bring higher levels of prosperity. Governments that embark on preparing such a National Urban Policy will be able to come up with a better direction and course of action to support more creative, productive and inclusive urban development.

This national urban policy can also provide the general framework to orient public interventions in strategic regions and urban areas and be a reference for sectoral ministries, regional powers and local authorities. It can serve as a platform to support a collective action and a key reference for legislative institutional reform.

The National Urban Policy is also a good instrument for public and political awareness of the gains to be obtained from sustainable urban development. It is based on the idea of optimizing endogenous development by nurturing and utilizing local assets, particularly human capital, exploiting local potentials and maximizing local opportunities.

2. Creating a More Compact City at a Human Scale

African cities need to move away from rigid planning and from urbanization that creates low densities and long distances: an unsustainable model that generates cities poorly connected, socially divided and economically unproductive.

Leaders and decision-makers from Africa need to promote a different type of city that optimizes demographic and economic densities, privileges proximity among firms and people with a dominantly mixed land-use pattern. They need to create conditions to promote cities that are socially diverse and multi-functional.

Current trends based on serious data and information show us “Where We Are”. This knowledge and the desire to change in order to create cities that are sustainable clearly point towards “Where We Go”. There is an urgent need to operate a structural change for a more Compact City at a human scale that minimizes transport and service delivery cost, optimizes the use of land, reduces energy consumption and supports the protection and organization of urban open spaces.

A Compact City that optimizes economies of agglomeration with real prospects to generate value and wealth, create jobs and opportunities. A city that can reduce the overall costs of societal transactions and has possibilities to harness the potential of diversity and heterogeneity by optimizing the economies of urbanization.
For this purpose, there is a need of reforming current urban planning concepts and practices in order to make them a simple and effective tools for governments and local authorities to achieve sustainable urban development. This different – New – urban planning will generate strategic densification to reduce urban sprawl and to avoid land speculation in order to accommodate demand in close proximity to existing and potential economic opportunities, infrastructure and public transport.

Ministers attending this IVth AMCHUD Conference may wish to consider, depending on their national contexts, to initiate urban expansions (when absolutely necessary) and to undertake infill projects within or close to the fringes of urban areas in selected cities in order to promote sustainable settlement planning through a more efficient and equitable use of spatial resources, including basic services, facilities, infrastructure, energy sources, and most importantly available sub-utilized land.

Guided urban expansions and infill projects are excellent means to create more Compact Cities. These solutions can only be sustainable if sufficient land is procured in advance so as to respond to the massive needs of existing and projected populations. Obviously the challenge of acquiring peri-urban land has to be addressed, including through the sharing lessons of experiences at this conference. Indeed, well-planned and organized densification can support the use of modes of transportation other than private automobiles, e.g., public transport, cycling and walking, thereby reducing car dependence, energy consumption, CO₂ emissions and air pollution.

More compact communities reduce the use of greenfield land by building on brownfield sites within existing city limits, and contribute to conserving material resources as a result of reduced requirements for new infrastructure, e.g., roads, sewerage, water pipes, etc.

In the long-run urban expansions can contribute to more efficient and sustainable development patterns by guiding new redevelopment to areas which are better suited for urbanization within the city limits or close to them. The idea of these type of projects is to produce a ‘piece of city’ with minimum, but adequate conditions, to accommodate expected population growth, and offer affordable land supply and opportunities to inhabitants already living in informal areas and slum neighborhoods.

Urban expansions and infill projects have a great potential for the creation of sustainable patterns of development. They need to be accompanied by legal and financial tools to enable municipalities to acquire and manage sufficient land, pay for compensations, create public land and open spaces, and regulate mix-land uses, etc.

3. Undertaking Institutional and Legal Reforms

Synchronizing Linkages, Developing Complementarities and Interactive Synergy

The multiplicity of entities that are responsible for policy development, programme execution, and front-end service delivery requires a high degree of collaboration and coordination to obtain optimum results on the ground. There is a broad range of sectors involved in urban planning and service delivery. There are multiple administrative levels, numerous activities to be undertaken, as well as different spheres in which responsible actors are located.

There is an urgent need to develop, consolidate and refine effective mechanisms for fostering closer collaboration and coordination among public institutions, first, among national Ministries, and secondly across administrative levels. High level strategic tools such as national visions, annual and long term plans and budgets; special programmes have been used to foster coordination at the national levels. Practices such as cabinet consultations and approvals; and organs such as inter-ministerial technical committees have been common mechanisms enabling
various Ministries to work together. However, a tendency towards operating in a sectoral manner has remained a major impediment for the realization of the full potential of such mechanisms, especially within the current multiparty democratic dispensation.

The urban agenda transcends individual Ministries, and its outcomes are more than the sum of its parts. Successful implementation requires a holistic approach to producing results. It also requires the continuous collaboration of other core Ministries, such as those of national planning, Finance, local government, and infrastructure development. One way of fostering collaboration is to change the target of urban intervention results from outputs – which are often sectoral – to outcomes, which are more integrated. Ministerial performance on the ground, and specifically at the city level, needs to be measured not by the traditional sector outputs, but by the contribution it makes to achieving defined strategic outcomes.

Similarly, in the modern era of multi-level governance, mechanisms for enhancing vertical relations between national and sub-national level institutions are equally critical. After more than two decades of decentralization reforms in Africa, a lot of insight has been obtained on the effectiveness of mechanisms deployed in operationalizing inter-governmental relations. Reconciling working relations between central government agents at the local levels and those operating under the jurisdiction of local authorities has remained challenging. The mix of competences, resources and capacities required in planning and service delivery call for a continuous engagement and collaboration among levels.

Creating More Solid and Flexible Institutions through Capacity Building.

The enhancement of local government capacity has been a primary agenda throughout the reform process in the past two decades. Changes in organizational structures, development of skills, streamlining of mandates and responsibilities, as well as improvements in resource allocation have been among the measures taken. However, it is observed that the reforms have been largely juridical, structural and organizational. Organs have been reconfigured, skills have been developed, functions have been reassigned and some administrative methods and rules have been changed. Yet, the actual delivery processes have been altered only minimally. The area of planning, for example, has remained top-down, dominantly technical, with insufficient degree of participation, and very complex in its implementation and desired outcomes. It projects a control orientation, thus almost acting as an inhibitor to local initiative and to endogenous development, and it does not have a built-in capacity to revitalize local assets, engage with local stakeholders, and promote the essential agglomeration economies.

An urgent and priority task in this respect is the development of appropriate programmes for developing local capacity in planning and improving service delivery. The critical requirements at this level are not only skills and expertise, but also the need to come back to basic aspects such as the capacity to harness and deploy resources and potentialities in the private sector and among communities and neighbourhoods.
Closing the Urban Divide

There is an urgent need of transforming planning and basic service provision from factors which perpetuate urban inequity to instruments for fostering inclusiveness and prosperity. Urban investments, in terms of goals and design, have to take into account the needs and interests of all social groups. Particular attention needs to be given to the wellbeing of the urban poor and the various constraints facing them in accessing services. Special needs of women and youths have to be given priority attention both with respect to improving everyday living as well as enhancing means of livelihood. The design of urban expansion and slum upgrading programmes based on minimal yet meaningful conditions to make them sustainable is critical. These interventions are essential to protect poor and vulnerable locations from various risks such as floods and landslides. Meeting minimum conditions is also the first step to enable the city to adapt to climate change conditions by laying down a street system and related infrastructure such as an efficient drainage system. Skills and mechanisms have to be put in place for ensuring that spatial as well as project design are fully inclusive.

Initiating Legal Reforms

Underlying the success of the above measures is the urgent need to review and adapt the corpus of laws guiding urban development and the delivery of basic services. It is acknowledged that within the framework of decentralization a number of initiatives have been undertaken to deal with the legislative requirements of such institutional change. Several countries are right now engaged in the exercise of enacting and/or reconciling laws pertaining to planning, local governance, and service delivery. It may be useful, while taking advantage of the reform momentum to review existing laws with the objective of streamlining them and bringing into line with the desire of promoting compact urbanism. It is also desirable to adopt simple norms and basic principles that can guide urban development and facilitate the transmission of tools and guides to end-users.

4. Advancing a New Pact: Learning to Do Things Together

This IV AMCHUD Conference is a great opportunity to celebrate a New Pact that first and foremost recognizes that current urban planning practices are hardly working in many African cities. Yet, African cities have manifested a great potential in leveraging national transformation, in harnessing the people's creativity, and in serving as critical nodes in the connection with the global system. Bearing in mind that the African future is predominantly urban, the imperative of overcoming the current limitations needs to be addressed now.

Awareness precedes action and creates conditions to celebrate a New Pact; a pact through which notions such as solidarity, identity, participation and collective actions are re-invigorated in order to recreate and reorganize a more prosperous society.

Achieving higher levels of sustainable urban development is not an accident. It requires clear policies, simple norms and basic principles, and concerted efforts from public, private and social actors. It also requires moving away from the idea that national development is to be achieved by external assistance, designing, on the contrary strategies, actions and plans that optimize endogenous factors.

Creating conditions to achieve more sustainable urban development requires that different levels of government learn to work together. This is not only a technical and administrative exercise; it is also a political process that results from a political commitment. UN-Habitat's analysis on what works for cities and countries to become more prosperous shows that the most innovative programmes and actions developed at local level still require a strong involvement from the central government that takes the form of policy reforms, institutional strengthening and the allocation of ad hoc budgetary resources.

Effective decentralization demands strong coordination capacities from the central government and dynamic and well-governed city governments that can respond to the challenges of subsidiarity as a new organizational principle. Likewise, creative local entrepreneurship is to be combined with regional and national support and with a clear and solid intervention from private and social actors.

Countries subscribing to this New Pact are invited to prepare a National Urban Policy that can reassert the role of urbanization in national development. UN-Habitat can assist in this process. These countries would have more chances to guide future development of the national
urban system and more possibilities to better coordinate and guide actions of different levels of government and strategic partners. They will also increase the prospects of more coordinated public and private investments in urban and regional development and consequent improvement of cities’ productivity, inclusiveness and environmental conditions. The opportunity of learning from each other, and also from other parts of the world will be enhanced.

Countries subscribing to this New Pact are also invited to articulate the National Urban Policy with specific actions in selected cities through urban expansions and infill projects that can respond to urbanization needs without further expanding urban peripheries. Urban expansion and infill projects can provide the city with a spatial structure that can support socio-economic and environmental sustainability. These projects can provide for a rational urban structure to minimize transport and service delivery costs, optimize the use of land, and support the protection and organization of urban open spaces. It will facilitate the optimisation of investment in human capital through increased access to basic services.

Countries subscribing to this New Pact need to move from fail-safe design that tries to address so many dimensions of the complex urbanization process to safe-fail experimentation and implementation, using an incremental approach that starts with basic aspects. Urban planning needs to be selective rather than comprehensive, as promoted by UN-Habitat’s “Coming Back to Basics” approach. According to this approach, it is simply impossible to simultaneously tackle the complex and massive challenges faced by African cities. Rather, it is more effective to focus on specific, quick and simple interventions and strategic ‘levers’ to enhance the spatial structure of cities and guide the basic organization of public space, and prepare for subsequent interventions such as the provision of basic services, the construction of buildings and the rational subdivision of plots to generate economic value for land and encourage investments.

Countries subscribing to this New Pact are encouraged to plan in advance for future development and at the scale of the urbanization challenges. They are also invited to plan by phases in order to manage time, costs, changes and risks, starting with very basic designs and solutions that can be affordable overtime on a larger scale.

Towards South-South Cooperation

Celebrating a new pact also entails a critical appraisal of externally derived concepts and approaches to urban development. While appreciating that Africa is not unique, the continent’s specificity and local variations have to be understood and potentiality optimised. Experiences of other parts of the world need to be harnessed, particularly those from the South. Indeed, lots of innovations are taking place in Asia and Latin America. Apart from bilateral arrangements, collaboration with Ministerial bodies of these regions needs to be developed. Once again, UN-HABITAT can play a facilitate role in this process.

Strategic Issues to be Addressed

While considering this document, the conference, among other matters, may also address the operational implications of pursuing the suggested four issue areas—transformative national urban policy; compact city at a human scale; institutional and legal reforms; and learning to work together. Proposals will be made by resource persons at the conference on the specific questions to be considered. Particular attention will be given to initiatives already taken and progress achieved. A proper synchronization will be proposed with the various issues raised in the technical background paper.