Economic and Social Council

Economic Commission for Africa
Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development
Fourth session
Dakar, 2–4 May 2018
Item 6 of the provisional agenda[*]
Parallel panel meetings on the subthemes
of the session: (c) Sustainable cities and communities

Background paper on the subtheme "Sustainable cities and communities"

I. Introduction

1. The effective implementation and monitoring of Goal 11 of the Sustainable Development Goals, on safe, resilient and sustainable cities, is of particular significance because Africa is currently undergoing a rapid urban transition. At its current rate of urban growth, 3.42 per cent[1,] of the continent is projected to be predominantly urban in less than two decades. The speed and scale of urbanization compared to that in other regions of the world presents opportunities for inclusive sustainable growth but also poses challenges for African cities in their efforts to cope with planning and managing the urbanization process. The effective implementation of Goal 11, the New Urban Agenda adopted during the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) and various regional urban commitments, specifically those under aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063 of the African Union, The Africa We Want,[2] are all of critical importance in ensuring that urbanization becomes a driving force behind the transformation, prosperity and improved well-being of Africa.

2. Key issues relating to progress in implementing policies and programmes in pursuance of Goal 11 are examined in subsequent sections, which consider the current state of progress towards attainment of Goal 11; the implementation of Goal 11; recommendations; and key messages. Data challenges persist as only 6 out of 15 indicators (40 per cent) have data and sufficiently defined methodologies to measure progress.[3]

---

[*] E/ECA/ARFSD/4/1

[1] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision, Highlights* (ST/ESA/SER.A/352).

[2] African Union Commission. *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. Addis Ababa, 2015.

[3] United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa. *Economic Report on Africa 2017: Urbanization and Industrialization for Africa's Transformation*. Addis Ababa: Economic Commission for Africa. Available from https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/ERA/ERA2017/era-2017_en_fin_jun2017.pdf, March 2018; and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, op. cit.

II. Status of implementation of Goal 11, on safe, resilient and sustainable cities

3.   The status of implementation of Goal 11 in Africa is varied, with some countries making remarkable strides in implementing all the Goals, others making only minimal progress and others still even regressing. The reported status of implementation therefore is based on the data and information available from selected regions and countries and highlights good practices and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating implementation.

4.   In the past decade, Africa has registered some progress in the area of access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services. The proportion of slum dwellers in sub-Saharan Africa declined from 62 per cent in 2010 to 56 per cent in 2014. North Africa showed the largest reduction, with its slum population decreasing at a rate of 5.2 per cent per year compared to an annual increase of 2.3 per cent between 2005 and 2010. An absolute reduction of the slum population was reported in other countries, namely, Cameroon, Chad, Egypt, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Nigeria. Thus, in Nigeria, 5.5 million people, in Egypt, 2.2 million people, in Cameroon, 551,000 people and in Malawi, 219,000 people were upgraded to better living conditions and taken out of slums over the four years (2010 to 2014).[4] Those improvements notwithstanding, the region continues to account for 24 per cent of the global slum population.

5.   In some countries, such as Botswana, Mauritius and Morocco, access to water and sanitation has improved over the past five years. Morocco reported 100 per cent coverage of improved water sources in urban areas and 94 per cent in rural areas in 2013. Mauritius has no disparities between urban and rural access to water and reported close to total coverage with 99.8 per cent. Botswana reported the proportion of households with access to improved water source through piped or tapped water as 91 per cent in 2013.[5]

6.   Ensuring housing affordability remains a complex issue of strategic importance for inclusive and sustainable development. Yet, housing remains largely unaffordable even for middle-income groups in the region. The rise in the absolute number of slum dwellers in the region is indicative of the difficulties faced by households in gaining access to housing, water and sanitation services. Market provision of housing has not yielded much success in providing affordable and adequate housing for all, including women, young people, the elderly and persons with disabilities, as a priority in the development agenda. There is thus an urgent need for sound national housing policies and programmes and their effective implementation aligned with national development strategies for wealth and employment creation, industrialization, job creation, climate change and disaster resilience.

7.   Transport also plays a critical role in sustainable urbanization. Notable efforts have been made in some countries to enhance the accessibility of public transport through investments in mass transit systems for efficient services. In particular, the bus rapid transit systems in Lagos and Johannesburg and the light rail in Addis Ababa are enhancing access to transport systems. At the same time, access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all largely remains an unfulfilled aspiration in the region and will require the radical overhaul of transportation systems. The growing urban sprawl in cities is placing a huge financial burden on households, making transport their largest expenditure item (8–16 per cent of their budget),[6] and even higher for lower income households, which at times

---

[4]Calculated from the UN-Habitat Global Urban Indicators Database, accessed on 2 March 2018.

[5] World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, *Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2017 Update and SDG Baselines* (Geneva, 2017); Commission on Growth and Development, *Urbanization and Growth* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2009).

[6] World Bank, *Stocktaking of the Housing Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges and Opportunities* (Washington, D.C., 2015).

spend more than 30 per cent of their monthly budget on basic travel requirements. If African cities are to become more inclusive, increased investments in public transport are urgently needed relative to car-based travel that serves the needs of a limited proportion of urban dwellers in the region.

8.   From the standpoint of land consumption, African cities are becoming more expansive, growing faster in area than in terms of population, with the result that they are now encroaching on agricultural and ecosystem services land. The past decade (2001–2010) witnessed an increase in the urban sprawl and a decline in urban density and increase in land consumption rates in 25 African cities, which have grown faster than their urban population. Cities such as Kampala, Bamako, Johannesburg, Kinshasa and Lagos are on the brink of consuming land at a pace faster than their population growth, with a land consumption rate measuring between 0.8 and 0.9 times their population growth rate.[7] Kigali and Luanda have a land consumption rate equal to that of their population growth and some small cities, such as Al-Qayrawān in Tunisia and Ndola in Zambia, have low land consumption rates compared to their urban population growth rates (0.3 and 0.6 respectively). Uncontrolled land consumption exacerbates the challenges associated with access and provision of basic access to services; economic productivity and efficiency; resource use and greenhouse gas emissions; cropland and ecological encroachment; and travel time for social and economic purposes.[8] Effective land use and spatial planning and adequate controls are needed to counter this type of development and promote the development of cities with more compact urban form that offers innumerable social, environmental and economic advantages.

9.   Regarding progress in the domain of air quality and municipal and other waste management, the rapid urban growth in Africa has been accompanied by a rising demand for energy and waste management services with implications for environmental sustainability. Only 8 per cent of African urban areas met the levels of fine particulate matter, or $PM_{2.5}$, recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), namely, 10 micrograms per cubic metre. Kampala, the capital of Uganda, and Bamenda in Cameroon, measured more than 10 times the recommended WHO level for air quality, while cities in Cameroon, Mauritius, Nigeria and South Africa recorded 6 times more the recommended levels. High levels of $PM_{2.5}$ are associated with cooking with solid fuels, cleaning and outdoor pollution, which have led to lung and respiratory diseases, cancer and health situations in which the elderly and children are the most vulnerable. Despite the reduced use of solid fuel for cooking in some countries such as Ethiopia, where the use of solid fuel dropped by 9 per cent from 2011 to 2016, and Ghana, where it dropped by 14 per cent in 2014, solid fuels still account for more than 50 per cent of cooking in most countries. In some countries, such as Rwanda, use of solid fuels for cooking is over 90 per cent.[9]

10.   Many countries do not prioritize the collection of solid waste, and the general picture is one of low levels of management of municipal waste and even less servicing in informal settlements. For example, Benin and Kenya reported less than 30 per cent of solid waste collection with collection levels in formal settlements that were four and three times higher, respectively, than those in informal settlements, while Egypt and Senegal, on the other hand,

---

[7] Atlas of Urban Expansion, multi-phase research effort to monitor the quantitative and qualitative aspects of global urban expansion, conducted by the New York University Urban Expansion Programme in partnership with UN-Habitat and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.

[8] United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, op. cit.

[9] World Health Organization, Public health, environmental and social determinants of health. WHO Global Urban Ambient Air Pollution Database (update 2016). World Health Organization. Available from http://www.who.int/phe/health_topics/outdoorair/databases/cities/en/.

reported 86 per cent collection of solid waste, but in those countries collection levels were also higher in formal settlements.[10]

11. As for urban and regional development plans, these are essential in ensuring that the rapid urban growth in Africa is harnessed as a force of sustainable development. Although there are no comprehensive city-level data on urban and regional development plans, existing evidence shows that many African countries have resolved to formulate and implement national urban policies. A reported 13 countries are at the stage of formulation while 21 are in the process of implementing such policies.

III. Key interlinkages with other Goals and their impact on policy

12. Significant synergies exist between Goal 11 and other Sustainable Development Goals and also the New Urban Agenda and Agenda 2063, which offer strategic entry points to inform effective implementation of these commitments, related policies and strategies. While Goal 11 is specifically concerned with safe, resilient and sustainable cities, it is also closely aligned with other Goals. If well planned and managed, urbanization can accelerate progress towards the following Goals:

    (a) Goal 1: urban poverty is lower than rural poverty in many African countries, pointing to the poverty-reducing potential of urban growth and related opportunities;

    (b) Goal 2: the transformation of African agriculture requires well-functioning urban centres that can support and service rural economies, also serving as conduits for national and regional value chains;

    (c) Goal 3: cities offer enhanced access to health services and the social indicators on selected health variables are better in urban than in rural areas;

    (d) Goal 6: provision of improved water and sanitation may be more cost-effective in cities than in more widely dispersed settlements;

    (e) Goal 8: experience has shown the critical importance of productive and inclusive cities to efforts to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth;

    (f) Goal 9: urbanization and industrialization are intrinsically associated, despite the disconnects observed in Africa between the two processes;

    (g) Goal 10: if well planned and linked to the expansion of productive economic sectors, urbanization offers opportunities to tackle inequality;

    (h) Goal 13: compact, resource-efficient and resilient cities can significantly reduce emissions while enhancing disaster resilience.

13. Accordingly, the multisectoral impacts of urbanization in Africa need to be fully considered and cities and human settlements should not be viewed exclusively from a sectoral standpoint. This multisectoral perspective will lead to a prosperous Africa built on inclusive and sustainable development, with cities and urban settlements driving job-rich growth and improved well-being.

---

[10] UN-Habitat. Solid Waste Management in the World's Cities: Water and Sanitation in the World's Cities, Earthscan, London, 2010.

IV. Implementation of Goal 11

14.   There are continuing and notable efforts in countries to ensure access to affordable housing and basic services and to upgrade slums. These include policies, strategies and operational programmes that countries have rolled out. Some of these efforts are highlighted below, as described in national reports submitted by African member States for the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III).

15.   The integrated housing development programme pursued by Ethiopia has been key in increasing the number of homeowners in the country. More than 400,000 condominiums for lower income groups have been constructed, creating more than 200,000 jobs, boosting the construction industry, regenerating former inner-city slum areas and promoting home-ownership for low-income households.[11] Other notable government efforts that have promoted access to affordable housing and basic services include the housing development programmes in South Africa that link finance and subsidies to individual households and also facilitate access to housing finance for low-income groups across the country. In this way, South Africa has been able to provide more than 3.7 million subsidized housing opportunities for very poor households, and housing for 12.5 million people.[12]

16.   In Mauritius, housing development for the economically less advantaged population groups has increased the proportion of homeowners to 93 per cent in rural areas and 83 per cent in urban regions.[13] The country has a number of squatter settlements, where residents have no property rights to the land, depend on low quality material for shelter and have limited basic infrastructure. Through the Ministry of Housing and Lands, the Government has therefore taken action to regularize squatters, based on certain specific criteria, and is also enforcing a zero-tolerance policy for new cases of squatting, whereby legal action is taken to evict squatters from sites that they have illegally occupied.

17.   Efforts to improve access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all have been reported by Morocco, which has made direct public investment in infrastructure by mobilizing resources from the State budget for the development of public transport. Funds raised through value added tax (VAT) and from the Hassan II fund have been used to improve and modernize services and urban transport infrastructure, such as the Rabat-Sale and Casablanca tramway systems and the restructuring of bus networks. Through the integration of all its transport modes, the country has now ensured that the majority of its population has convenient access to public transport.[14] Some countries still face problems, however, in ensuring access to affordable and accessible public transport and meeting the needs of women, young people, older persons and persons with disabilities.

18.   In the Sudan, inclusive and sustainable urbanization and the capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management have been enhanced by negotiating the peaceful resolution of armed conflicts that force internally displaced persons to leave their homelands and seek refuge in urban areas and by establishing new towns and satellite cities to absorb new migrants and to accommodate additional urban growth in large urban centres. These measures have been guided by the

---

[11] UN-Habitat, *The Ethiopia Case of Condominium Housing: The Integrated Housing Development Programme*. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (Nairobi, 2010).

[12] Republic of South Africa, Report to the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, (Habitat III), Ministry of Human Settlements (Pretoria, 2015).

[13] Republic of Mauritius, Report to the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), Statistics Mauritius (Port Louis, 2015).

[14] Kingdom of Morocco (2015), Report to the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, (Habitat III), Ministry of Habitat and Urban Policy (Rabat, 2015).

Khartoum Structure Plan for the period 2008–2033, while ensuring balanced regional development and rejuvenating rural economies.[15]

19.   Notable implementation efforts relating to land consumption in Mauritius have been guided by the country's spatial framework and local spatial plans, which are also updated regularly with due consideration for all stakeholder needs. Mauritius has rolled out a project on land administration, valuation and information management systems to ensure that secure and efficient arrangements are in place to manage and administer land in a professional manner and instil confidence in the country's land transaction system. For its part, South Africa adopted an integrated urban development framework in 2014, following the adoption of the country's national development plan, with the aim of ensuring the effective implementation over the next 20–30 years of well-planned and well-managed urban spaces that are liveable, inclusive and resource-efficient, recognizing that urban and rural areas operate on a continuum.

20.   Similarly, disaster management in Botswana is guided by the country's national policy on disaster management of 1996, which focuses on prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery, and development, and advocates the integration of disaster management into development. In addition, a national disaster risk management plan formulated in 2009 guides all sectors and stakeholders in preparing their own emergency and disaster risk management plans.[16] The country also has a national disaster risk reduction strategy for the period 2013–2018, which has guided disaster-management activities.

21.   In Mauritius, a master plan has been formulated for the integrated for the development and integrated management of the country's water resources. The master plan considers the water sector within the broader context of national development in its relation to population growth and to industrial, agricultural and social development, and work is now under way on the development of water infrastructure over the next three decades, until 2050. In addition, Mauritius has launched a disaster risk reduction management project, covering such areas as climate risk analysis, involving the conduct of comprehensive climate studies relating to inland flooding, landslides and coastal inundation. The country is also operating a green lending scheme, under which Mauritian banks, in partnership with the Agence française de développement (French Development Agency) is providing 40 million euros in green credit to support green investment decisions in the areas of sustainable energy and environmental performance. The national youth strategy for the period 2007–2031 of the Sudan guides the participation of young people in both urban and rural areas in the provision of emergency assistance during natural disasters such as floods and heavy rains.

22.   Air quality in Botswana is monitored according to the provisions of the country's Atmospheric Pollution (Prevention) Act of 1971 and Botswana prepares annual reports on air pollution in order to keep in check the level of discharges and emissions of pollutants. Botswana maintains air quality by integrating pollution mitigating measures into its national development plans.

23.   While countries have reported certain good practices in the implementation of urban policies and strategies, many are still encountering difficulties in planning and managing urbanization. Harmonizing multiple urban and other development-related agendas at the national level, including the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 and the New Urban Agenda has also posed difficulties for them.

---

[15] Republic of the Sudan (2015) Report to the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Urban Development and National Council for Physical Development (Khartoum, 2015).

[16] Republic of Botswana, Report to the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, (Habitat III), Ministry of Lands and Housing (Gaborone, 2015).[15]

V. Principal recommendations

24.   Goal 11 provides a unique opportunity for global action to promote cities that are safe, resilient and sustainable, and that serve as hubs of prosperity and well-being for their growing numbers of inhabitants. As Africa is the continent with the highest urban growth rate, it has much at stake in this regard. Rapid urbanization offers considerable opportunities to accelerate the inclusive growth and transformation of Africa, provided that its cities are well planned and managed. Accordingly, the following broad recommendations are put forward in fulfilment of Goal 11:

(a)   The role of urbanization in driving inclusive growth needs to be strategically integrated into national development planning, linked to economic and sector priorities and targets. Given the multisectoral impacts of urbanization, including in the achievement of many of the other Goals, the promotion of safe, resilient and sustainable cities needs to be considered as a means of achieving broader development goals, including the reduction of poverty, unemployment and inequality;

(b)   Well financed and designed national programmes that deliver solutions to different economic and social groups are urgently needed to respond to the enormous challenge of the availability, affordability and quality of housing. The continued responsibility of the State in the provision of housing and services needs to be emphasized, in view of the limitations faced by the private sector in providing affordable housing and services to all. Furthermore, the potential of the housing sector as an economic driving force should be tapped to improve urban form – the physical patterns, layouts and structures that make up cities, to create jobs, and to promote domestic industries, while responding to the ever-growing demand;

(c)   Strategic investments in urban infrastructure and services, including energy, transport, water, sanitation and waste management, will enhance the potential of cities to facilitate sustainable development in Africa. Currently, the potential of African cities to deliver improved economic and social outcomes is significantly undercut by huge infrastructure and service deficits. In particular, the provision of affordable and accessible public transport as a necessary public good must be prioritized in African urban areas as a means of enhancing access to education, services and employment and, at the same time, reducing the carbon footprint and the growing use of cars, while enhancing economic productivity and efficiency;

(d)   Given their role in generating emissions and their high vulnerability to physical, human and economic damage, cities and their local authorities must be taken into due consideration in policy frameworks to address climate change. Member States should recognize the role of well-planned and well-designed cities based on principles of compactness, resource-efficiency and resilience in advancing adaptation to and the mitigation of climate change;

(e)   Land-use and spatial planning policies, backed by the necessary legislation and governance mechanisms are essential to ensuring that the evolving urban form of Africa's growing cities is sustainable. Curbing urban sprawl and the associated high rates of land consumption is a core priority in this regard, given the exacerbating impact of the costs of service and infrastructure provision. Other consequences of urban sprawl to be tackled include dependence on car-based travel; limited access to

transport and thus social and economic opportunities; and encroachment on agricultural land and ecosystems. Within cities, the provision of public spaces is key to ensuring inclusive urbanization, improving productivity and harnessing the economic value of urban land;

(f) Effective planning, governance and management constitute key elements for inclusive and sustainable urbanization but face capacity limitations in most African cities. Pre-emptive and integrated national, regional and local development planning serves as an important framework to ensure the sustainability of cities and human settlements. Urban planning and management underpinned by adequate financial and human resources are needed, together with data for evidence-based responses to emerging challenges and opportunities;

(g) The production of quality statistics and research on human settlements and sustainable development should be enhanced to ensure rigour in the collection of data, to broaden and deepen the quality of analysis and data available in a usable way to a wider audience of policy stakeholders and to monitor implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and progress in fulfilment of Agenda 2063.

VI. Concluding remarks and key messages

25.   Urbanization is one of the most significant megatrends currently being experienced by Africa. Consequently, Africa must take strategic advantage of its current urban transition processes to ensure its sustainable development. Accordingly, as the continent undergoes this urban transition, the following messages are put forward for consideration:

26.   *Urbanization is a multidimensional enabler of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063:* Safe, resilient and sustainable cities are crucial to ensuring that urbanization is not only a driving force of sustainability, but also necessary for the attainment of many of the other Sustainable Development Goals, including those related to poverty and inequality, economic growth and climate change. For that reason, the efficient planning and management of cities should be a priority in efforts to achieve a broader development that is socially inclusive, economically productive and environmentally sustainable.

27.   *National development planning must include a strategic urban perspective*: Given its implications, overall growth and transformative effects, urbanization should be integrated into national development planning from a strategic, multisectoral standpoint linked to socioeconomic and sectoral priorities, policies and strategies. This will ensure policy coherence of the urban and spatial dimension within the overall context of social and economic development. In addition, given the predominantly rural population and agriculture-led economies of Africa, it is important to emphasize the rural-urban linkages in policies, strategies and programmes at all levels, whether regional, national or local. A sectoral, silo approach to urbanization will fail fully to unleash the demonstrated potential of urbanization to advance inclusive social and economic prosperity.

28.   *Urbanization requires major investment and doing nothing is not an option*: Population density can lower the per capita costs of services and infrastructure, but that does not make urbanization cheap. Cities require massive public investment to accommodate a rapidly growing population in a compact environment. The return on urban investment is also high, in particular when investment occurs under a good planning framework, aligned with private sector investment and paired with well-functioning revenue and land value capture tools.

29. *African countries should take advantage of urbanization when it occurs*. African cities are growing fast, but that does not make them productive. Productivity arises from the density of economic activities in a well laid out and managed spatial economy. The prevalence of slums and informality in African cities indicates the resilience and creative energy of people, and also the productive opportunities lost through lack of planning and investment in advance of urban growth. The good news, though, is that countries can exploit the urban transition, which is still in process. This will require urgent short-term and well considered long-term actions, coordinated under broader national development frameworks.

30. *Effective urbanization policies and strategies require robust data and statistics*. The persistent paucity of data and insufficiently defined methodologies for the measurement of progress call for more investment in and allocation of resources to data collection, disaggregation and analyses, and the dissemination of reliable data to enable the effective implementation, monitoring and reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals.

_____