

Ministerial Segment of the Africa Regional Meeting on the SDGs, 4 & 5 November 2013, UNECA, Addis Ababa.

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Local Authorities Major Group

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Africa is currently in the midst of a number of simultaneously unfolding and highly significant transitions that all invite complete rethinking of the current developmental trajectories.

- Africa is the fastest urbanizing continent globally with an estimated growth rate of 3.4%. Already, more than 40% of Africa's people are urbanized and it is projected that 60% of all Africans will be living in urban areas by 2050. Africa's urban population will increase from an estimated 413 million in 2010 to a projected 1.23 billion by 2050. On the basis of these projections for urban population growth, African urban areas and services will need to accommodate a tripling of the current number of urban inhabitants by 2050.¹
- By 2020 GDP of African countries is projected to almost double from its 2008 real GDP value of USD 1.6 trillion. Emerging middle-classes are now starting to create sizable consumer markets. Nonetheless, Africa is still experiencing massive poverty and other social problems.
- Climate- and environment change related vulnerabilities are on the rise in throughout Africa, with much higher frequencies and greater severity of cataclysmic events, putting increasingly large numbers of people at risk, especially in cities.

At the same time, urban African characteristics, for example, the youth bulge, informal economies and community-based service delivery models, natural resources endowments and the reach of mobile technologies for micro-finance present significant opportunities for sustainable transition pathways.

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.

There are 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.

¹ UN-HABITAT. 2010. *The State of African Cities 2010: Governance, Inequality and Urban Land Markets*. United Nations Human Settlements Programme, Nairobi.

Due to the primacy of Cities in economic development and the massive vulnerability that people face in our cities, we propose that a specific SDG is included for Cities and urban local governments. We recommend that this goal be: *“Empowering inclusive, productive and resilient cities.*

Such a goal would include three targets:

(1) eliminate extreme urban poverty, expand employment and productivity, and raise living standards, especially in slums and informal settlements;

(2) ensure universal access to a secure and affordable built environment and basic urban services: housing, water, sanitation and waste management; low-carbon energy and transportation; and communication; and,

(3) ensure safe air quality and water quality for all, and integrate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, efficient land and resource use, and climate and disaster resilience into investments and standards.”²

In the quest for sustainable development, a focus on cities and human settlements is unique because it foregrounds space and place as well as the subsidiarity of local government. Cities constitute the arena where action is concretized. As engines of growth they are transformative; they concentrate the institutions and infrastructure required to bring about change. As hubs of peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing they are integrative; their championing of innovative approaches strengthens institutions and builds capacities. As homes for a majority of the world’s people, they are universal.³

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General, Rio+20, June 2012 has stated: “The road to sustainability runs through our cities and towns”.

We wish to see acknowledged the significant integrative role that cities and rapidly growing urban areas can play in the sustainable transformation of our continent in the implementation of the SDGs. Through directing investment, especially in large infrastructures in cities, towards more sustainable solutions, climate change adaptations, vulnerability reduction and home-grown technological innovation in basic urban services we can promote urban and human settlements development which can effectively address urban poverty and long-term sustainable development targets.

I thank you for your kind attention.

² The Urban Opportunity: Enabling Transformative and Sustainable Development Background Paper for the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda Prepared by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network Thematic Group on Sustainable Cities

³ Quotation from The Technical Support Team (TST) Issues Brief: Sustainable cities and human settlements is co-chaired by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme. This issues brief was co-led by UN-Habitat and UNEP with the participation of ECLAC, ESCAP, IFAD, ILO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNISDR, UN-Women, WHO, WMO, and the World Bank.

