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**To cite this article:** Ivan Turok (2015) Turning the tide? The emergence of national urban policies in Africa, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 33:3, 348-369, DOI: [10.1080/02589001.2015.1107288](https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2015.1107288)

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2015.1107288>



Published online: 16 Dec 2015.



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## Turning the tide? The emergence of national urban policies in Africa

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### ABSTRACT

It is widely believed that national urban policies in Africa are rare. This is a concern bearing in mind the formidable challenges posed by urbanisation in the context of low incomes and weak institutions. The paper unpacks the concept of urban policy and what it means for the way in which cities grow. It considers the situation in five countries with different approaches. The evidence indicates increasing interest in steering urban growth through coordinated actions on land, housing and infrastructure. The positive developmental arguments seem to carry more weight than the threats of disaster if squalor and social unrest are not addressed. Yet the appropriate policy responses are not clear-cut and there are many dilemmas faced. Capacitating city governments to plan and invest in networked infrastructure appears to be one of the priorities.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 May 2014  
Accepted 6 January 2015

### KEYWORDS

Africa's urban transition; urbanisation policy; housing and infrastructure programmes; policy coordination; planned urban extensions; slum upgrading

The conventional wisdom is that national urban policies (NUPs) are rare in Africa. This is a concern since the continent is only about half-way through its urban transition and the way the process is unfolding is problematic and replete with risks (Buckley and Kallergis 2014; Parnell, Pieterse, and Watson 2009; UN-Habitat 2014a). Official neglect of entrenched urban poverty, human vulnerability and environmental degradation is commonly attributed to some combination of unresponsiveness, short-sightedness and political denial on the part of national elites elected by rural majorities (Beall and Goodfellow 2014; Parnell and Simon 2014; Pieterse 2014; Stren 2014). Weak state institutions, constrained resources and obsolete regulatory procedures to manage the rapid physical and demographic expansion of cities are also bound to be relevant (Bekker and Therborn 2012; Turok and Parnell 2009; UN-Habitat 2008). Several decades of structural adjustment policies and neo-liberal ideas have not encouraged African governments to develop the planning tools, administrative systems and financial instruments required to design and deliver the essential elements of well-functioning cities, such as networked infrastructure managed by capable urban institutions (Bogaert 2011; Cheru 2014; Rakodi 1997; UCLG Africa and Cities Alliance 2013).

Bias towards the countryside on the part of international development agencies could be another hindrance (Fox 2014; Martine 2008; Parnell, Pieterse, and Watson 2009; UN-Habitat 2008), along with the emergence of competing priorities such as climate change, food security

and terrorism threats (Grant 2015; Stren 2014). The implication of all these factors is that African governments are sceptical of the possibility of managing spiralling urban growth and doubtful about focusing scarce resources on rectifying urban infrastructure deficits (UN-Habitat 2014a). Many attach more emphasis to supporting agriculture and rural development, partly because they believe this can stem the overwhelming problems that urbanisation seems to create (Fox 2014; Kayizzi-Mugerwa, Shimeles, and Yameogo 2014; Parnell and Simon 2014). Some state regimes are overtly hostile to swelling informal settlements in cities and respond with period evictions and clearances of communities occupying unauthorised land (Huchzermeyer 2011). This is all a far cry from embracing urbanisation as a potential force for economic transformation and social progress.

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on these generalised statements and propositions in the light of the current state of NUPs in Africa. It is motivated above all by the surprising lack of research and documentary evidence on urban policies across the continent. Drawing on a range of secondary sources and primary interviews, the paper provides a preliminary review of the experience in a range of countries where significant activity appears to be emerging. The analysis considers the attitudes and objectives of governments towards urbanisation, their determination and capacity to steer the process, and the various political and economic factors influencing their progress.

Urban policy may of course mean different things. For instance, it may refer to whether there is something explicitly called an NUP among the suite of government policies in a country. This is pretty straightforward – governments either have a formal approved NUP or they do not. Second, it could mean the political will and technical capacity to coordinate decisions across line functions and give them a territorial focus. This would exclude the purely symbolic ‘paper’ policies that have no practical import because the administrative competences or financial means of execution do not exist. It would include substantial urban actions that are embedded within broader socio-economic and environmental strategies. The third meaning relates to the *content* of urban policy, including whether the plans and priorities correspond to the objective needs of cities, what resources are invested and whose interests are ultimately served.

Definitional issues are clearly important. It is difficult to find any African governments with an NUP that has all-encompassing objectives and that is systematically implemented in practice. Yet this is not unusual elsewhere in the world because of the potential scope and complexity of such policies (Cochrane 2007; Van den Berg, Braun, and van der Meer 2004). Governments are primarily structured along sectoral/functional lines and find it difficult to align and integrate these policies in ways that respond to the variable circumstances of individual cities and towns (Buck et al. 2005). Using a more realistic interpretation of urban policy as an evolving process of incremental enhancement, the paper shows that there are examples of African countries trying to manage urbanisation more effectively and prepare for the future in appropriate ways. Coupled with the diverse national contexts in which urbanisation is happening, the conclusion is that NUP is very uneven across the continent, with some positive experiences emerging, some detrimental practices and other instances of shortfalls in capacity to implement laudable intentions. Generalisation across Africa is therefore becoming more difficult. Greater awareness of these diverse efforts could perhaps help to ensure that a turning point is really reached by encouraging governments to redouble their commitment to realise the positive possibilities of Africa’s profound urban transition.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section two summarises the conventional wisdom about African urban policies. The third section seeks to conceptualise NUPs in a way that is meaningful for the continent. Subsequent sections review the experience of five countries to identify the diversity of contemporary approaches. The conclusion draws the findings together and distils several lessons. The appendix outlines the methods and data sources.

## The conventional wisdom about African urban policies

Africa's urban population is expected to double within the next two decades or so (UN DESA 2012), presenting a once-off opportunity to harness the developmental advantages of functional cities. Africa is by far the world's poorest continent. Levels of formal employment are very low and almost two-thirds (62%) of urban residents are believed to live in 'slums' (UN-Habitat 2013a). Burgeoning cities with weak economies and deficient public services expose their citizens to heightened risks of hardship, disease, social conflict and environmental disaster (Buckley and Kallergis 2014; Parnell, Pieterse, and Watson 2009; UNEP 2013). Spontaneous and haphazard forms of urban expansion with inadequate public infrastructure undermine the attraction of private investment, hinder business growth and inhibit job creation (Glaeser and Joshi-Ghani 2015; World Bank 2013a). They also damage the integrity and resilience of regional ecosystems, thereby exacerbating water scarcity and food insecurity (Jha, Miner, and Stanton-Geddes 2013; UN-Habitat 2014a).

The fundamental purpose of NUPs in Africa, as elsewhere in the global South, is to provide a framework to enable urban growth to occur in ways that improve human well-being, ecological sustainability and shared prosperity (Turok and Parnell 2009). The rationale relates partly to the need to avoid cities getting locked into dysfunctional trajectories through incoherent and dispersed growth patterns which result in unnecessary congestion, overloaded infrastructure, worsening pollution and dense shack settlements in hazardous locations (UNISDR 2012; UN-Habitat 2013b). The argument also includes the benefits to productivity and growth that stand to be derived from careful urban expansion and coordinated development of housing, industrial and commercial property, physical infrastructure and other public facilities (African Development Bank 2011; Collier and Venables 2015; UN-Habitat 2012).

The received wisdom is that NUPs are very uncommon in Africa. For example, 'Very few African states have explicit policies to deal with urbanisation and intra-urban development challenges' (Smit and Pieterse 2014, 157). Similarly, 'national urbanisation and national urban strategies in Africa receive remarkably little policy attention today' (Parnell and Simon 2014, 237). In addition, 'most political leaders in Africa continue to refuse to accept that their societies are urbanising at a rapid and irreversible pace. This widespread denial ... creates a public policy vacuum' (Pieterse 2014, 201). A book edited by African Development Bank (ADB) officials concurs that 'most African governments continue to operate without any explicit national urbanisation strategy' (Kayizzi-Mugerwa, Shimeles, and Yameogo 2014, 158). The formal position of the ADB is that: 'Few African countries have given attention to the challenges and opportunities of sustainable urban development ... urban development has not been given a high priority in national development plans and poverty reduction strategies' (2011, 7).

These statements are generalised and the supporting evidence is unclear. To the author's knowledge there has been no systematic research on the subject. This makes it difficult to be more precise about the extent and nature of NUPs in Africa, and whether the situation is changing. The only possible exception is a high-level assessment undertaken by the UCLG Africa and Cities Alliance (2013). Their main purpose was to gauge whether local authorities are equipped by national governments with the powers and resources to manage urban growth. Ten qualitative criteria were applied to judge this 'enabling environment for well-functioning cities', including the legal status of local governments, their financial autonomy and support for staff development. One criterion was whether a formal national urban strategy exists, along with the means to implement it. Countries were placed into one of four broad categories, defined in the first column of Table 1. It should be stressed that the report provided a cursory summary, with no deeper analysis of each country's NUP. The results are disaggregated in columns two and three of Table 1.

One of the main conclusions was that: 'few countries have developed strategies to cope with the challenges posed by rapid urbanisation ... most African decision makers have not yet grasped the importance of the proper functioning of cities for the proper functioning of national economies' (UCLG Africa and Cities Alliance 2013, 10). This appears to confirm the conventional wisdom. However, looking at the detailed findings in Table 1, one could also draw a more positive conclusion. Seventeen countries (one in three) actually have a clear NUP. In five other countries there is a process of national reflection on urbanisation

**Table 1.** The existence of national urban policies.

Type of urban strategy in place	Number of countries	Country names	
A clear national urban strategy exists, along with the financial and technical capacities to implement it	4	Morocco	South Africa
A clear national urban strategy exists, but without the capacities to implement it	13	Senegal	Swaziland
		Algeria	Ghana
		Benin	Malawi
		Burkina Faso	Mali
		Cote d'Ivoire	Niger
		Egypt	Rwanda
		Ethiopia	Uganda
		Gabon	
National reflection on urbanisation is underway, but an urban strategy has not yet been defined	5	Cameroon	Nigeria
		Guinea-Conakry	Tunisia
		Kenya	
There is no national urban strategy	28	Angola	Madagascar
		Botswana	Mauritania
		Burundi	Mozambique
		Central African Republic	Namibia
		Chad	Sao Tome and Principe
		Comoros	Seychelles
		Congo Brazzaville	Sierra Leone
		Democratic Republic of Congo	Somalia
		Djibouti	Sudan
		Equatorial Guinea	Tanzania
		Eritrea	The Gambia
		Guinea-Bissau	Togo
		Lesotho	Zambia
		Liberia	Zimbabwe

Source: Derived from UCLG Africa and Cities Alliance (2013).

underway. This suggests a more diverse and nuanced situation than the unequivocal conclusion, especially if the 13 countries with an NUP are actively building their capabilities. Interestingly, there is no obvious spatial, size or urbanisation pattern to whether or not countries have an urban strategy.

## The concept of NUP

The first step in going beyond this analysis is to unpack the concept of NUP more carefully. The simplest definition is a government statement of what it intends to do within cities and towns to make them function better – economically, socially, ecologically and institutionally – and to help them accommodate future population growth more efficiently and equitably. It is bound to be broad in scope, offers a vision of a better urban future and encourages coordination across different departments and spheres of government in order to ensure that public and private investment decisions are complementary, carefully-sequenced and connected in space. The issue of coordination is crucial because the agglomeration externalities and creative dynamism that underpin prosperous cities stem from the proximity and interdependence between business, household and government investments in the built environment (Collier and Venables 2015; Duranton 2014).

Formal NUP documents may serve a symbolic purpose, but have little impact in practice. They can remain high-level expressions of principle with little effect on decision-making because the process of implementation is neglected. They lack direct command over resources or the ability to influence key policy levers, such as government budgeting procedures. They have little bearing on the way state regulations and controls – such as environmental laws or building standards – are applied by front-line staff to the decisions of private investors and households. They are also remote from the everyday practices by which many ordinary citizens negotiate access to cities and operate out of sight of official objectives and protocols (Huchzermeyer 2011; Simone 2014).

Instead, urban initiatives around the world have often started out as practical projects to build experience and credibility. Some have evolved into more elaborate programmes of activity, and then morphed into more integrated strategies (Cochrane 2007; UN-Habitat 2014b; Van den Berg, Braun, and van der Meer 2004). Table 2 summarises the essential features of each approach. Projects are manageable entities designed to achieve particular objectives within a finite timescale. They are convenient devices for mobilising resources and getting activity on the ground. Experimentation is possible and valuable experience can be obtained without having to change legislation, reorganise bureaucracies or alter mainstream budgets. A project approach also chimes with a broader worldview that the most effective policy shifts are achieved through decentralised, small-scale actions and incremental reforms, not radical changes engineered from above.

There is a sizeable tradition of urban projects in Africa dating back at least to the 1970s (Kayizzi-Mugerwa, Shimeles, and Yameogo 2014; Stren 2014). The emphasis during the first decade or so was on ‘sites and services’ housing schemes, often funded by the World Bank (Fox 2014). They were responses to the overcrowding, inadequate services and insecure tenure in expanding urban slums (UN-Habitat 2003). These schemes were very common in Zambia, Tanzania, Senegal and Kenya. Since then there has been a proliferation of urban projects covering a range of other issues related to health, education, training, basic services, livelihoods, mobility, safety, food security and disaster relief.

**Table 2.** Different approaches to national urban policy.

	Positive attributes	Negative features
<i>Urban projects</i>	Manageable entities able to achieve specific objectives Allows experience and credibility to be obtained Enables experimentation with new ideas	Support tends to be insecure and unpredictable Isolated projects are difficult to sustain and expand Many shortfalls and gaps in provision
<i>Sectoral programmes</i>	Institutionalised delivery enables larger-scale activity Generates momentum to address specific problems Implementation is consistent in different places	Risk of disjointed delivery of different programmes Separate efforts hamper the creation of integrated settlements Sectoral thinking inhibits broader socio-economic development
<i>Integrated urban policies</i>	Systematic approach permits more focus on the fundamental issues Coordinated activities produce more durable outcomes Strengthening city governance capacity generates wider benefits	Recognition of trade-offs and dilemmas requires tough choices to be made Coordination can complicate decision-making and cause delays

Discrete projects avoid the complications of altering official policies and legal procedures. However, lack of scale and continuity are often drawbacks because they rely on special funding, which is susceptible to the shifting preferences of sponsors. Projects also tend to be dispersed and poorly connected to more systemic interventions with a bigger impact (Grant 2015).

Sectoral programmes involve the delivery on a larger scale of particular urban services and networked infrastructure, including water, sanitation and transport. Programmes are institutionalised within a part of government with designated responsibilities and an established budget. This confers authority and permits the 'roll-out' of consistent services at higher volumes. The binding constraints are often the level of resources available and the technical capacity of the organisation. Both factors have hindered African governments' ability to ensure that essential services keep pace with urban population growth (Collier 2007; UN-Habitat 2008).

One pitfall is partial and disjointed delivery, since state entities tend to operate in silos with their own mandates. Vertical lines of responsibility impede alignment across functions and limit sensitivity to the local context, both of which are vital for creating rounded human settlements. For example, the pressure to provide low-cost housing at scale encourages building on cheap peripheral land, yielding dormitory townships with poor access to jobs and amenities (Bradlow, Bolnick, and Shearing 2011). Urban programmes have also tended to focus on pressing social concerns related to living conditions, rather than structural issues of insufficient jobs, livelihoods and tax revenues. Governments have been unsure of how to address the economic causes of poverty, and reluctant to insert an urban dimension into their spatially blind industrial and macro-economic policies. Infrastructure and housing programmes have periodically lost impetus because their financial demands have been perceived to be costs rather than investments in creating more productive places.

These experiences reaffirm the need for more holistic strategies that strengthen territorial decision-making (UN-Habitat 2014b). Institutional reforms are needed to enable different forms of infrastructure and services to be co-located in space, with the capacity to anticipate urban growth and prevent piecemeal investment. This also

means tackling market failures and other systemic issues that undermine coherent urban development, such as inefficient land markets, undeveloped housing finance institutions, inappropriate building regulations and unaffordable construction codes. A useful way of describing this approach is as a 'scaffolding' type of intervention, implying horizontal and vertical arrangements that address coordination failures by cutting across conventional administrative divisions. Successive levels of government support help to strengthen the performance of cities and can be scaled back if no longer required.

There are at least five distinguishing features discussed in the following paragraphs. These elements provide a simple schema to review and reflect upon the NUPs considered in subsequent sections. Considerable variation is to be expected depending on the national context. It matters whether a country is urbanising slowly or rapidly, has few or many resources for infrastructure investment and has weak or strong institutional capabilities. The biggest challenges exist where urbanisation is driven by push factors in poor countries with weak institutions. NUPs may be augmented over time, depending on the national appetite and experience, recognising urban policy as a process rather than a discrete event.

First, there is a political aspect concerned with building a shared understanding and rallying institutional support for focused action in cities. This implies advocacy to persuade decision-makers that promoting compact and connected urban development is important. It requires common guiding principles and a narrative that resonates with the popular imagination – common sense appeal expressed as a simple logic. An emphasis on city regions and urban–rural interdependence needs to replace the outdated urban–rural dichotomy. Productive cities facilitate rural development through stronger markets for rural products, improved services and resource transfers. Analytical work can strengthen the case for NUP through understanding underlying trends and demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of coordinated investment. Research may also reveal whether growth is excessively concentrated in the primary city, and secondary cities warrant additional support. NUP also needs political champions to coalesce the collective intent by orchestrating key government departments, utility companies, property developers, financial institutions and other stakeholders to work together and align their activities in particular places.

Second, there is a legal dimension to ensure that the way land is allocated and regulated facilitates efficient and equitable urban development, with less uncertainty and fewer disputes (Napier et al. 2013). It is partly about institutionalising consistent guiding principles, rules and land registration systems to enable more predictable and transparent property transactions, and to make it more difficult for arbitrary, exploitative and corrupt practices to exist (Durand-Lasserve, Durand-Lasserve, and Selod 2015; Fox 2014; Goodfellow 2013). It means replacing outdated and inappropriate planning procedures, zoning ordinances and building standards with more flexible systems (Parnell, Pieterse, and Watson 2009). Collective needs should be balanced against private interests, recognising that a higher density, mixed-use urban form acts like a kind of public good in improving accessibility to opportunities and productivity (World Bank 2013b). Mechanisms to give residents of informal settlements more security and to facilitate land consolidation and readjustment are also important (Huchzermeyer 2011; UN-Habitat 2013b). A simpler legal framework in many countries would help urban land to be transacted and developed

more quickly and fairly, and enable the retrofitting of existing built-up areas through renewal and redevelopment.

Third, there is a fiscal and financial element concerned with securing the funding mechanisms for public authorities to invest in costly urban infrastructure and municipal services (ADB 2011; World Bank 2013b). Novel financial instruments may be needed to support new energy grids, public transport networks, sanitation systems and other long-term urban assets, especially if constructed in advance of settlements being built, which is ideal. Besides conventional local property and sales taxes, this should include systems to capture rising land values associated with development and resulting from public investment and the rezoning of agricultural land to urban uses. The private finance sector should be expected to play a role in funding urban infrastructure, and may require careful government facilitation and partnership creation.

Fourth, there is a capacity-building aspect to strengthen the competences of the agencies responsible for implementation, particularly local government as the sphere closest to the people (Smit and Pieterse 2014; UCLG Africa and Cities Alliance 2013). This includes strategic leadership, sound project management, ethical integrity, accountability and external collaboration. It also covers technical skills to plan future urban extensions and to manage service delivery programmes, based on robust household and business demand projections. A related task is to bolster the ability of city authorities to engage local communities in settlement upgrading using people's own knowledge and labour power. Strengthening transparency and the voice of civil society in decision-making can also help to foster social cohesion and limit malpractice in government.

Fifth, there is a need periodically for special measures to bridge gaps in current provision, to act as catalysts to address urgent problems, or to spur wider behavioural changes. Just getting started can be good for confidence and demonstration effects where the challenges seem overwhelming. For example, dedicated initiatives to accelerate informal settlement upgrading and to develop interim forms of land tenure may be required where there is bureaucratic resistance and legislative reform is slow (Napier et al. 2013). Temporary arrangements may be useful to expedite the transfer of surplus land between state entities so that development can proceed in well-located places. Experimental approaches that bypass established procedures may be necessary to tackle particularly complicated or unusual problems, such as brokering agreements across political boundaries where metropolitan areas and corridors have spread into other territories.

In the following sections we consider the extent to which selected African countries are developing NUPs, choosing countries in different circumstances that illustrate different features.

### **Ethiopia's far-sighted commitment to urbanisation**

Ethiopia is a very poor, mainly rural country dominated by subsistence agriculture. The government's top priority is industrialisation to boost jobs and incomes (Cheru 2014). National leaders have come to recognise that urbanisation can contribute to this objective. It necessitates preparing for large-scale population growth in the cities to avoid the negative externalities associated with informal urban expansion. The government has made considerable progress to develop an urban policy agenda within the last 10 years,

including legislative reforms, capacity-building initiatives, investment in infrastructure and a novel approach to the physical enlargement of cities.

Table 3 shows that the country is only 17% urbanised, yet 55% of GDP is generated in urban areas and the urban economy is growing very strongly (UN-Habitat 2014a). Consequently, the urban population is increasing at 3.6% per annum and another 38 million people are expected to live in urban areas by 2050. This is one of the largest absolute increases in Africa, making it vital to plan ahead to accommodate this growth. In addition, 76% of the existing population still live in 'slums' with poor services, so there is pressure to upgrade these conditions as well as to absorb the new growth. Addis Ababa dominates Ethiopia's urban system and is experiencing a massive construction boom. All other cities are much smaller, but most are also growing quickly.

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was established in 1991, following the fall of the militaristic Derg regime. The government has pursued a relatively centralised state-led development model, with restrictions on foreign investment and complete state ownership of the land. An important objective is to strengthen the indigenous private sector, which is currently small. Since 1995 Ethiopia has also had a relatively autonomous regional sphere of government (reflecting territorial ethnic differences), and it subsequently went through a process of devolution of powers and functions to local government, especially in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. Both cities have been elevated to a similar level of authority as the nine Ethiopian states, with powers over service delivery, housing and job creation (UN-Habitat 2014a). Urban areas have only had functioning local governments since 2000. There has also been a parallel process of fiscal decentralization to give city authorities more direct control over public spending and to strengthen transparency and democratic accountability.

The leadership of the governing party has been going through a transition over the last decade or so from tough rural revolutionaries who aligned themselves mainly with the peasantry and against feudalism. The younger generation of leaders recognises the need to take a long-term view of the country's spatial development trajectory, and to give greater priority to addressing the challenges and opportunities of the rural-urban shift. The process began around 1999 when one of their advisers prepared a concept paper outlining a sequence of necessary policy reforms and initiatives.

**Table 3.** Urbanisation statistics for each country.

	Urbanisation level (1950) (%)	Urbanisation level (2010) (%)	Rate of urbanisation (2010–2020) (%)	Urban population living in 'slums' (2009) (%)	Projected growth in urban population (2010–2050) (million)	Largest city (& population in 2010)
Ethiopia	5	17	3.6	76	38	Addis Ababa (3 m)
Morocco	26	57	1.6	13	10	Casablanca (3 m)
Ghana	15	51	3.3	40	23	Accra (2.6 m)
Uganda	3	15	5.6	60	30	Kampala (1.6 m)
South Africa	42	62	1.2	23	22	Johannesburg (4 m)
<b>Africa</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>Cairo (11 m)</b>

Note: Figures in bold are the average and total values for Africa as a whole.

Source: UN-Habitat (2013a, 2014a).

The first stage was to modernise their outdated planning and land legislation (dating back to 1945) and create an enabling environment for more systematic urban development. One of the outcomes was a new law governing the lease of urban land to allow for long leases to users (30 years for industry, 40 years for commercial and 99 years for residential). The second priority was to strengthen the technical capacity of local, state and national officials to guide urbanisation. A Masters' programme in urban management was established at the civil service university with support from the Netherlands and well over 3000 students have graduated to date. The third step was to improve the inter-governmental system of fiscal transfers and enable local and state governments to raise their own revenues. The fourth was to start planning urban expansions and infrastructure provision within individual cities. These are clearly long-term tasks rather than quick-fixes, although Ethiopia has proceeded with urgency.

A National Urban Development Policy Framework was approved in 2005, indicating the more positive view of cities that was emerging. It was intended to be the vehicle for implementing the urban component of a wide-ranging national plan – Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (ASDEP). In practice, limited resources and skills shortages restricted its impact. Nevertheless, 'this was a turning point in economic policy since ASDEP officially lifted urban issues onto the national development agenda' (Cheru 2014, 37). In 2008 an Urban Local Government Development Project (ULGDP) was initiated to address the capacity constraints by improving municipal systems of planning, budgeting, procurement and project execution. It is funded by the World Bank, with technical assistance from the German agency GIZ. For the first time city municipalities have access to transparent and predictable funding if they meet performance benchmarks. Approximately US\$270 million was invested in 19 cities between 2008 and 2014 (World Bank 2014a).

These cities are now managing their assets better and delivering infrastructure and housing more efficiently. As they collect more tax revenues, their scope to borrow and invest further increases. Citizens have also been given more scope than hitherto to influence decisions about priority services in their areas. Some 2.5 million people living in these cities have benefited from the infrastructure investments and upgrades, including new roads, water and drainage systems, latrines and landfills (World Bank 2014a). Approximately 95,000 jobs in cobblestone construction and other infrastructure works have also been created for local residents through support for small-scale enterprises and local procurement. The ULGDP was doubled in size in 2011 because of its demonstrable success, and the lessons learnt are now being applied in Kenya and Ghana.

Another feature of Ethiopia's urban policy is the systematic approach to urban expansion. Local government controls the use of land and sells leases to different users and developers. The process of planning urban extensions begins with a projection of the future population 25 years hence based on the latest census data. Existing population densities are assumed to continue in the extension areas, which yields a total amount of land required for the next 25 years. This is mapped onto the topography of the city and areas that are unsuitable for development are excluded. Different segments around the city's perimeter are then given different levels of priority according to their ease of development. The first area is subject to a grid plan based on one kilometre square blocks. The arterial and core infrastructure is superimposed on the grid plan and the cost is calculated.

Different blocks have different combinations of high- and low-cost housing, economic uses and public facilities.

The boundary of the extension area is also clearly defined to prevent incursions. Existing (rural) land users are compensated for withdrawing their access rights and any improvements made, such as growing crops. The land is then progressively serviced and allocated to developers, depending on demand. The land lease law requires them to cater for all income groups (with different plot sizes) and to cross-subsidise from high- to low-income households. Four- to six-storey apartment blocks are the norm. The bulk infrastructure is partly funded under the ULGDP. It is believed that the process of urban expansion will be largely self-financing, with the sale of the land leases generating the revenue to pay for the infrastructure and compensate existing users.

In 2013 Ethiopia embarked on a Cities Prosperity Initiative in partnership with UN-Habitat to learn from their international networks about how best to address infrastructure backlogs and to accommodate population growth in an inclusive and efficient manner (Cheru 2014). UN-Habitat has supported a range of projects since 1998, covering information systems, service delivery, public transport and housing. The new emphasis is on building sustainable institutions, including specialist technical skills, financial mechanisms and analytical capabilities. Severe shortages of built environment professionals partly reflect the scale of the construction boom underway.

To conclude, Ethiopia's NUP is embedded in broader strategies and translated into concrete actions. The government's latest Growth and Transformation Plan reaffirms the need to industrialise the economy and accelerate the urban transition (Cheru 2014). Clustered government departments help to promote coordination and collective determination as a developmental state. Connecting urban interventions to other policies improves alignment and impact on the ground. City municipalities are intended to be the key implementing agencies, although they require further capacity enhancement to become effective.

### **Morocco's progressive human settlements policy**

Morocco is a middle-income economy and much more urbanised than Ethiopia. The priority for more than a decade has been to curtail the number of people living in 'slums', rather than to accommodate urban growth. Social dialogue, political stability and determination have sustained a sizeable government effort to transform the housing conditions of about a million people.

The urban population grew strongly in the post-war period, from an urbanisation level of 26% in 1950 to the current 57% (Table 3). Agricultural decline prompted rural outmigration. The cities were unable to absorb the exodus with sufficient jobs and housing, which resulted in many unauthorised, poorly serviced settlements. Urban growth has slowed in recent years and the proportion of the urban population living in 'slums' has been reduced from 37% in 1990 to 13% in 2009 (UN-Habitat 2013a, 2014a). Much of this achievement stems from a major urban housing initiative being sustained since 2001. This was lauded by UN-Habitat as 'one of the world's most successful and comprehensive slum reduction and improvement programmes' (quoted in Herzog et al. 2013, 13). Government decision-making remains quite centralised, so purposeful national policies are vital to get things done. The unusual coexistence of a kingdom and a democratic government seems to have provided stability and continuity over this period.

For many years Morocco's expanding urban 'slums' were officially regarded as dangerous breeding grounds for all kinds of undesirable social activities. Lack of support within government inhibited efforts to ameliorate people's living circumstances and to provide serviced land for low-cost housing. The main political response was forced slum clearance and resettlement on the urban periphery, far from jobs, schools and other facilities (Lahlou 2014). Poor communities were not considered to have any rights to the city.

These harsh conditions and authoritarian policies provoked great social unrest and political conflict in the cities during the 1980s and 1990s. Towards the end of this era, and as part of a gradual process of democratisation, the ageing king made an agreement with the main political parties to stop the evictions and to initiate settlement upgrading by improving urban infrastructure and housing. Over the next few years a stronger social consensus was built through dialogue with the political parties, business, trade unions and civil society. The new king who came to power in 2000 also became more enlightened during this process, and helped to elevate social considerations in government policy.

A turning point was reached in 2001 when 'decent housing' was declared a national priority. A three-year programme was launched to integrate slums into the urban fabric, partly through offering people new housing where land was available. There was a steady build-up of technical capacity, policy instruments and financial commitment within the public administration. Approximately 130,000 people benefited from this National Action Plan for Reabsorption of Slums (Lahlou 2014). A novel funding source for social housing was the introduction of a tax on cement. This was subsequently extended to tax all building materials and was used to fund other aspects of urban renewal.

In 2004 this initiative was scaled up with international support into a major new programme to combat urban poverty called 'Cities Without Slums'. The scheme targeted 250 neighbourhoods for upgrading in 25 cities with high levels of unemployment, poor housing and inadequate municipal services. The national framework was adapted to local contexts through stakeholder participation, thereby ensuring more of an integrated territorial approach. Key instruments included subsidies to private developers to build affordable housing; making public land available for development; streamlining the planning system and contracts with city authorities to implement the policy effectively. Altogether between 100,000 and 150,000 affordable housing units and serviced sites have been built each year. As a result, Morocco's slum population was cut by about three-quarters between 1990 and 2013. This may have helped to insulate its cities from the uprisings in many other Arab countries in 2010 (UN-Habitat 2014a; for an alternative view, see Bogaert 2011).

The main constraints have been government resources, the sheer scale of housing need and the shortage of well-located land. Some households have remained *in situ*, especially in Casablanca and Rabat, but most communities have experienced some dislocation (Bogaert 2011). Many experts believe that there should have been more emphasis on localised upgrading and development to avoid the relocation and loss of accessibility to urban livelihoods and amenities (Herzog et al. 2013). Cooperation between different parts of government has also been strained at times, and the limited capacity of municipalities has delayed the devolution of responsibilities to them (Lahlou 2014).

Summing up, Morocco's approach illustrates both the strengths and limitations of a dedicated national programme to transform urban housing conditions. The scale of the physical achievement is impressive, although there are lingering concerns about

the social and economic consequences of families being displaced from central locations. The emphasis may have been different if democratic city institutions had been in charge.

### Ghana's emerging pragmatic urban policy

Ghana faces the twin challenges of preparing for large-scale urban growth and tackling the extensive poverty and congestion that already exist in its cities. The government has recently recognised the developmental arguments for managing urbanisation more coherently (Obeng-Odoom 2010), but still lacks a clear strategy, institutional capabilities and resources to act accordingly (World Bank 2014b). The urban population has grown strongly in recent decades to an urbanisation level of 51% in 2010 (Table 3). Nearly half of urban residents live in informal settlements without services. The rate of urban growth is particularly high in Accra (4.6% p.a.) and Kumasi (4.7% p.a.), linked to Ghana's discovery of oil and relatively strong economic performance in recent years (UN-Habitat 2014a).

Ghana's president has made the case for an NUP on the grounds that cities can only drive national prosperity if they are properly planned and governed. This cannot be left to municipalities because of their fragmented boundaries, constrained responsibilities and administrative weaknesses. After a four-year period of technical analysis, policy reviews, workshops and extensive domestic and international consultation, Ghana's first NUP was launched in March 2013. The preparatory work included an advocacy campaign on television and radio to make the case for managed urban growth because of the 'close association between urbanisation and socio-economic development' (Government of Ghana 2012, 12).

The NUP aims to promote 'sustainable, spatially-integrated and orderly development of urban settlements with adequate housing, infrastructure and services, efficient institutions, sound living and working environments for all people to support rapid socio-economic development of Ghana' (Government of Ghana 2012, 25). Extensive investment in urban infrastructure funded by national government and managed by municipalities is intended to alleviate congestion and create a decent living environment to accelerate the country's progress. Although the NUP document is wide-ranging, it does not claim to 'provide an all-round panacea or solution for all our urbanization challenges ... (but rather a) framework and direction for dealing with issues ...' (Government of Ghana 2012, 3). It also stresses the need for cross-cutting support, explaining that coherent urban development has been undermined in the past by dispersed responsibilities and policy conflicts (Government of Ghana 2012, 14).

The NUP was formulated by an advisory body, the National Development Planning Commission, with implementation supposedly coordinated by the Urban Development Unit within the Department of Local Government and Rural Development (DLGRD). This is a small entity with few resources and little influence over the rest of government. There are no coordinating mechanisms in place at the time of writing, so it remains a formal policy without explicit priorities, phasing or means of delivery (World Bank 2014b). National and local forums have been created to put urban issues on the agenda of other stakeholders, and the president has said they should be taken seriously, but it is too soon to assess their effectiveness.

The DLGRD aims to strengthen municipal capacity, including forums to engage shack dwellers and civil society organisations in a participatory approach to settlement upgrading. The Cities Alliance has helped to develop the framework, with financial support from the World Bank and GIZ. Efforts are also underway to strengthen the DLGRD's relationships with other government departments to give the NUP more traction. A recent urbanisation review of Ghana advocates greater determination to harmonise government policies in relation to urban land markets, transport connectivity and financial planning (World Bank 2014b). In a separate initiative, the World Bank is providing US\$150 million for a five-year programme to improve water and sanitation across Accra. Less than one in five households currently enjoys access to waterborne sanitation. The new programme may be another indication of the government's desire to address the effects of rapid urban growth, although there are mixed views about the depth of its commitment bearing in mind competing priorities, such as dire electricity shortages facing the country.

An interesting feature of Ghana's NUP is recognition of the informal sector, including 'changing the official attitude towards informal enterprises from neglect to recognition and policy support' (Government of Ghana 2012, 24). There are commitments to end evictions from informal settlements, support *in situ* upgrading and introduce new forms of housing finance. This will not be straightforward because of engrained attitudes that such settlements are illegal and unwelcome. An initial priority is to name and number all streets. This may start the process of gradually regularising, servicing and collecting taxes to fund ongoing infrastructure improvements.

An inefficient land registration system and overlapping rights to the use and development of land are major obstacles to coherent urban growth (Ubink and Quan 2008; World Bank 2014b). Customary arrangements tend to dominate (essentially tribal trusts), which creates uncertainty around converting undeveloped land to urban uses. Informal mechanisms for allocating land and negotiating physical development result in many prolonged disputes. There are evictions of households in low- and middle-income neighbourhoods who thought they owned the property or had rights to occupy it, only to discover that someone else had a more legitimate claim. Combined with an ineffectual planning system, the result is a scattered and sprawling pattern of private investment in property development, alongside extensive areas of urban decay and neglect. The issues surrounding urban planning, land and densification are inadequately addressed by the NUP at present, perhaps reflecting vested interests in the current system.

In conclusion, Ghana's formal adoption of an NUP suggests a growing interest in its urban transition. However, institutional shortcomings and resource constraints hamper effective action on urban land, infrastructure and planning matters. Several initiatives have emerged to tackle these, although the process will not be straightforward.

### **Uganda's embryonic urban policy**

Uganda's biggest urban challenges are to accommodate large-scale population growth in decent conditions and to strengthen urban economies. The number of people living in cities is projected to grow seven-fold from 5 million in 2010 to 35 million by 2050 (UN-Habitat 2014a). Preparatory work is in progress to establish some of the technical and institutional foundations to enable cities to function more efficiently and equitably.

Urbanisation is proceeding from a low base, reaching 15% in 2010 (Table 3). The urban growth rate is exceptionally high at 5.6% per annum, and even higher in Kampala at 6.7% (UN-Habitat 2014a). There is widespread poverty and sprawling peri-urban settlements, with nearly two-thirds of urban residents living in 'slums' with limited services. Uganda has experienced an economic growth spurt recently, linked with the discovery of oil. Yet the informal economy dominates, with 84% of all jobs. Kampala is the economic hub with nearly a third of the country's urban population. Prevailing patterns of private investment and development are haphazard (Goodfellow 2013).

Uganda began to formulate an NUP in 2010, supported by the Cities Alliance. The government recognised that the urbanisation trajectory was unsustainable because of the entrenched poverty, environmental degradation, inadequate housing, crime, disasters and congestion in the cities. It also understood the case for planning urban areas 'in order to harness their potential as engines of economic growth' (Government of Uganda 2013, 6). The first step was a review of the problems facing five cities, subsequently extended to all cities and large towns. The suitability of national planning legislation for guiding urban growth was also assessed. A draft NUP was formulated, followed by stakeholder consultation through national and local forums. These should assist implementation by building institutional support across government and external role players.

The draft NUP aims 'To promote liveable urban areas that are organized, productive and sustainable' (Government of Ghana 2012, 4). This requires establishing an institutional, financial and legal framework to enable better managed urban development, including stronger local administration, environmental protection and supportive housing, infrastructure, transport and economic programmes. The scope is somewhat ambitious considering the government's constrained capacity at present.

Work on a financial strategy has recently commenced, with the World Bank introducing a novel approach to investment which encourages experimentation between cities. Success depends on political will and coordination across line departments (Lall n.d.). It has been difficult to get parliament to approve the NUP when a small minority of MPs represent urban constituencies and the rest see it as a threat. This can be offset to some extent by identifying urban champions within departments and encouraging inter-departmental cooperation. The Ministry of Housing, Land and Urban Development is ultimately responsible for the NUP. Its main function is physical planning. Over time it has gradually increased its technical capacity, legitimacy and political influence within government by introducing practical programmes to deliver services in selected cities.

Government policy towards Kampala has been particularly contentious over the years, partly because of opposition party control of the municipality. The president has been 'willing to interfere in the city's affairs to secure political support. Projects have often been delayed or cancelled at the behest of groups who promise to deliver votes in return' (UN-Habitat 2014a, 29). This has undermined the formal planning rules and land-use regulations governing urban development, entrenched a system of patronage and resulted in the proliferation of unregulated commercial and residential buildings across the city (Goodfellow 2013). The situation has been volatile at times, and 30 people were killed in riots in 2009. Along with corruption and lack of resources (UN-Habitat 2014a), this may have contributed to the government's decision to abolish the city council in 2010 and replace it with a new Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA).

One of KCCA's problems is under-bounding because it only covers part of the metropolitan area. This arose because traditional landowners did not want their land incorporated into the city as this was potentially threatening loss of control. Customary land ownership is a challenge for urban planning throughout Uganda: 'the lack of clear property rights has removed a large proportion of land from the market. In fact, only 18% of private land is registered and titled' (Lall n.d., 13). Land market issues have complicated the transition out of agriculture and the re-use and redevelopment of urban land for higher value activities over time.

Summing up, the growth of Ugandan cities has been generally haphazard, with extensive forms of physical growth, inadequate basic services, weak urban management and major financial constraints. An NUP is beginning to emerge in the context of substantial political and institutional challenges.

### South Africa's delayed urban policy

South Africa has lacked the appetite for an explicit NUP until recently. The damaging spatial legacy of apartheid complicates the situation, since impoverished rural communities are perceived to deserve redress and priority attention. Many politicians also believe that rural-urban migration should be discouraged because of the social dislocation. The government is more capacitated and resourceful than in most African countries, and municipal funding has tended to follow the population distribution. This has enabled large-scale delivery of housing and basic services, with a pro-poor emphasis (SA Presidency 2014; Turok and Borel-Saladin 2014). With no clear urban vision, however, building on cheap peripheral land has tended to reproduce spatial segregation and impose high transport costs on the poor (COGTA 2014; National Planning Commission 2012; Parnell, Pieterse, and Watson 2009; Turok 2014).

The country urbanised early through mining and industrialisation, and the urbanisation level reached 62% in 2010 (Table 3). The rate of urban growth is relatively low at 1.2% per annum at present, but higher in the major cities (UN-Habitat 2014a). Since the advent of democracy in 1994, sizeable government investment in housing and services has reduced the proportion of urban residents living in 'slums' from 46% in 1990 to 23% in 2009 (UN-Habitat 2013a). However, the absolute numbers of people without housing and services in the major cities are still very large, causing considerable frustration. Official ambivalence about urbanisation has translated into a reactive and somewhat indifferent approach towards informal settlements and backyard shacks, including periodic demolitions and evictions of communities occupying unauthorised land (Bundy 2014; Huchzermeyer 2011; Turok forthcoming).

An initial Urban Development Framework was approved by the cabinet in 1997, along with a rural equivalent, but it lacked a political champion and was ignored (Harrison, Todes, and Watson 2008; Turok and Parnell 2009). Selected officials made another attempt to introduce an NUP in 2009, but the cabinet was unsympathetic since rural development was the declared priority. Since then escalating community protests in the townships and informal settlements have forced the government to take urbanisation pressures and problems more seriously (Bundy 2014). Rising electoral threats to the ruling party in the major cities have also helped to shift the climate of opinion. Meanwhile, the costs of continuing urban sprawl for transport and bulk infrastructure have escalated, raising concerns in the National Treasury. A draft Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF)

was approved by the cabinet late in 2014 and is currently out for public consultation (COGTA 2014). It proposes policies to strengthen urban economies, resource efficiency and social progress. Every city will be encouraged to formulate a long-term growth and development strategy to provide focus and direction. The preparation of the IUDF was more inclusive than hitherto, so the chances of it gaining traction are higher.

In addition, the National Development Plan of 2012 devoted a whole chapter to the case for integrated human settlements (National Planning Commission 2012). It was followed by new legislation designed to streamline the outdated urban planning system and promote the principles of social justice, inclusion and accessibility. An Urban Settlements Development Grant and a National Upgrading Support Programme have been introduced to assist municipalities to upgrade informal settlements and to acquire and service land for low-income housing (Turok forthcoming). The Treasury has pressed ahead with several initiatives to promote more coherent spatial development and to align investment in transport, housing and economic development (Turok 2013). It has launched a City Support Programme to strengthen the technical capacity of the metros and an Integrated City Development Grant to incentivise compact urban investment. These initiatives are beginning to have effect at the city level, although the commitment across government remains uneven and periodic ministerial reshuffles have been disruptive.

To conclude, South Africa illustrates the drawbacks of a partial, sectoral approach. Building low-income housing on the periphery has undermined important urban principles. Elements of a more integrated NUP are emerging, offering better prospects for the future. An outstanding challenge is to shift prevailing patterns of private sector investment, which currently favour greenfield locations and self-contained communities.

## Conclusion

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, there is evidence of increasing support for explicit urban policies in Africa. The paper has discussed five countries in different circumstances with a growing interest in shaping the urban fabric. In three countries there is more than a decade of experience of delivering strategic projects and programmes. The desire to strengthen NUPs is important considering the daunting challenges involved in meeting the pent-up demand for land, housing, infrastructure and jobs in major cities and towns, and doing so in a way that creates more productive and liveable places.

There are many uncertainties about how to influence urban development in the context of scarce resources and weak institutions. There is little established knowledge about what interventions are most effective, and in what combination and sequence. This calls for greater creativity and experimentation, as well as learning from other countries about what can be done. Building confidence and expertise by getting started on tangible projects has proved important where political support is ambivalent. International agencies can help to sponsor new initiatives, pool knowledge and spread good practice. There are encouraging signs of interest from the ADB, the African Union and the Economic Commission for Africa (Kayizzi-Mugerwa, Shimeles, and Yameogo 2014). Researchers and academics can make valuable contributions too by asking incisive questions of current practice, evaluating the outcomes, establishing an evidence base, and analysing the multiple constraints that need to be overcome.

A simple conclusion is that NUP is an evolving process, going far beyond a formal document or a discrete decision. Political backing is often tentative at the outset, and may take time to find formal expression and establish commitment. Developing effective institutions, appropriate legal frameworks and useful financial instruments to deliver robust urban plans and programmes is obviously a gradual process of extension and augmentation. The analogy of erecting successive levels of scaffolding to enable coherent urban development is useful in highlighting (i) the progressive enhancement and amplification of urban policy over time and (ii) the role of national government in creating the framework conditions to influence urban growth, rather than taking control of the process.

A second conclusion is that the argument for NUP in enabling economic development may be more compelling than the traditional message that neglecting poverty and squalor threatens social unrest and disaster. Spotlighting the ability of cities to generate investment, jobs and tax revenues could be more persuasive than accentuating fears about the risks of urban deficits. This rationale needs further refinement and explication because it may have unintended consequences. For example, in focusing on the positive possibilities of urbanisation, governments may be seduced by the prospect of creating new 'fantasy' satellite cities that bypass the problems of existing cities and marginalise the poor (Cain 2014; Grant 2015; Watson 2014). International property developers offer the tantalising prospect of attracting exceptional levels of private investment if governments support these exclusive developments at the expense of established urban areas.

A third message concerns the administration of land for urban development. Most countries struggle to control harmful practices and ensure more productive and socially-just use of urban land. They also find it difficult to collect property taxes and to recover the beneficial effects of public infrastructure investment on land values. Parallel systems of land ownership and regulation cause confusion and complicate property development. The simplest sites to build on are typically greenfield locations which avoid disturbing existing communities, reclaiming brownfield sites, retrofitting older buildings and intensifying the urban core through higher density and infill development. More attention needs to be given to interventions that can promote a more efficient spatial form, along with mechanisms to capture a share of rising land values to reinvest in networked urban infrastructure.

Finally, guiding urban growth requires city governments with appropriate powers and resources. There are difficult trade-offs and choices to be made – between treating and pre-empting problems, upgrading established settlements and supporting extensions, rehabilitating old infrastructure and preparing for new growth. Understanding the local context is crucial to inform these decisions, including the complex interactions between demographic, economic and ecological processes. Cities need accountable leaders able to build a shared vision, address difficult dilemmas and work in partnership with other stakeholders to deliver progress on the ground. Relying on national government or international organisations to do the job is risky, since they have less legitimacy and familiarity with local conditions. Each sphere of government has a different role to play, including checks and balances to limit concentrated power and control by vested interests.

## Acknowledgements

The paper draws partly on an earlier study undertaken by the author for UN-Habitat and the Cities Alliance (UN-Habitat 2014b). Support from Remy Sietchiping, Themba Phakathi and Rene Hohmann

is gratefully acknowledged, along with advice from Julian Baskin, Jackie Borel-Saladin, Bob Buckley, Dave De Groot, Mohamed Halfani and Leanne Seeliger. The usual disclaimers apply.

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## Appendix: Methods and data sources

There is a serious paucity of knowledge and evidence about urban policies in Africa. There are no historical accounts of how and why NUPs have evolved in particular countries, no independent analyses of their significance and value, and no evaluations of their impact and outcomes. It is difficult even to assemble up-to-date information or commentary on the contents and procedures of urban policies. Most countries that have formal NUPs do not seem to promote them or even make them available on the Internet. Of course they also evolve and the emphasis can change within a few years. Varying terminology and diverse languages are other complications in researching this subject. This may help to explain why it is widely believed that there are few if any urban policies in Africa. This situation is extremely unhelpful in terms of learning from experience, sharing good practice and encouraging innovation.

The approach adopted in preparing this paper began with a desk-top study of existing academic and policy literature, and a thorough internet search for relevant material, including the websites of government departments and international agencies, professional magazines and newspaper reports. A series of 15 telephone and face-to-face interviews were then carried out with academics and consultants working in countries

either where there was some NUP preparatory work in progress or where they had been approved and were being implemented. A range of officials from selected governments and international organisations including UN-Habitat, the World Bank and the Cities Alliance were also interviewed. A snowball technique meant following up knowledgeable contacts recommended by each interviewee. Different sources of evidence were validated by cross-checking and triangulation wherever possible.