

Action Plan for African Cities

A Strategy for the Cities Alliance

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is the fastest urbanizing region in the world, and is set to double its urban population in the next 20-30 years. This urban growth is overwhelmingly the urbanization of poverty, as poor people are displaced by war, disaster and famine or, more significantly, seek better opportunities in cities. Most growth will take place in small and secondary cities, where existing backlogs and capacity constraints are most extreme.

If current policy trends continue, the urbanization process in SSA is likely to be chaotic, unplanned and inefficient. A contrary and more optimistic vision is possible, and which is based on a number of clear principles. These include:

- Urbanization is inevitable and, if properly planned-for and managed, has the potential to make a significant contribution to economic growth;
- Decisive action taken over the next few years (<5-10) could reap extremely significant, long-term benefits;
- National economic growth, social stability, as well as rural and urban poverty reduction is increasingly dependent on the effectiveness and efficiency of cities; and
- National and citywide approaches that anticipate and respond to urbanization, and which recognize the urban and urbanizing poor as resources, partners and as citizens, are essential.

The Cities Alliance is the world's pre-eminent partnership focused on the challenge of cities, and their potential to play a decisive role in economic growth, poverty reduction and human development. The Cities Alliance works through its 24 members and is a unique combination of multilateral and bilateral agencies, associations of local government, developing countries, and international NGOs. The CA membership covers the spectrum from the World Bank to Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI).

The CA members have prioritized support to SSA. In this context it is an optimal time for the Alliance to develop a bold strategy that will allow it to play a far more active and decisive role in catalyzing action and providing support to SSA cities, and countries. A number of CA members are already very active in Africa, and can bring a range of skills to the partnership. In particular:

- The World Bank has a track record of high-quality analysis, a focus on urbanization and decentralization, and the capacity to make significant investments in both human capital, and infrastructure;
- United Cities and Local Governments (Africa) has re-emerged as the consolidated voice of local governments on the continent;
- UN-Habitat has a network of country based representatives, a strong normative knowledge base and has mobilized grant resources for country-specific profiling and planning in Africa.
- Slum/Shack Dweller International is increasingly active in mobilizing the urban poor into savings-driven federations in an increasing number of African countries.

- Countries such as Brazil and South Africa have already demonstrated their ability to effectively transfer knowledge and experience to cities and countries in Africa;
- French co-operation has a significant programme in Africa, including a track record of direct support to African cities;
- Germany has a significant portfolio focusing on decentralization and local governance.
- Increasing city to city cooperation between African and Northern cities, often within the context of Donor funded programs.
- Other bilaterals such as Britain maintain a diverse range of urban programmes, supporting both analytical work and technical assistance.
- Increasingly African governments are recognizing the importance of cities as drivers of economic growth.

There is substantial assistance already being provided in the region by CA members and partners, both through the Cities Alliance and, more significantly, through their own work programmes. In addition to country-specific activities, there are important regional initiatives such as that of the Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS), which seeks to overhaul out-dated approaches to urban planning.

There are a number of key challenges for the Cities Alliance in this proposed initiative. These include:

1. To ensure that investments made to support policy and analytical activities are better aligned to capital investments with positive impacts on the economy, and on the lives of all citizens, particularly the urban poor;
2. To build upon CA members comparative advantages, and their existing activities; and
3. To build a partnership based on the exchange of information, sharing of experience, and improved collaboration between CA members, and with local partners.

Proposal:

The Cities Alliance proposes to develop and implement an Action Plan for Sub Saharan Africa, with a first phase of 2-3 years. The main objective of this Action Plan is to improve both the quality and quantity of urban development assistance in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Action Plan would have two interrelated tracks; firstly, a country programme track linked with investments and facilitating coherence of effort among CA members, building on the experiences of the Ghana and Uganda programmes, and including resource mobilization for additional countries. The second would be a broader programmatic track aimed at facilitating a common understanding of development challenges in the region, advocating for policy and legislative changes, promoting knowledge exchanges, development of country pipelines, and other activities in support of Action Plan objectives.

The Action Plan aims to do the following:

1. In a changing continent the question of what urban means to development assistance has not been fully explored. The action plan aims to **raise the profile of the key urban challenges in Africa, based on evidence and analysis**, in order to increase awareness and recognition of the challenges and opportunities presented by urbanization and to form an evidence-based consensus for informed

decision-making.

2. Urbanization is a one off process and experience demonstrates that retrofitting is vastly more expensive than proactive investment. In this context it is imperative to **Increase essential investments in infrastructure, services and capacity, and to target such investments** in order to respond to the needs of the rapidly increasing urban population and to maximize the opportunities of urban growth.
3. Urbanization brings with it opportunities to better meet the needs of the poor. A wide range of actors are involved in the urban space pursuing often independent but complimentary agendas. Very little understanding exists as to who is doing what where. Within this context lessons are being re-learned and opportunities for partnerships are being missed. The action plan aims to use the CA's country programming product line to **build upon and consolidate the existing activities and portfolio of CA members and international networks of the urban poor to capture the depth and breadth of experience and lessons and to promote coherence of effort** – a central philosophical underpinning of the Cities Alliance, which was significantly reinforced through the adoption of both the *Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action*.

Essential to the success of such an Action Plan will be a clear focus on empowering local governments, promoting stable national policy and fiscal frameworks and, through the secretariat, mobilizing a partnership amongst Cities Alliance members, building upon the comparative advantage of each member.

Informed by the World Bank's new Urban and Local Government Strategy and building upon existing analytical and operational activities, the Africa Region of the World Bank will have a lead role in the programmatic track of the initiative, working in primary partnership with the Cities Alliance via the Secretariat and the World Bank Institute. The world Bank is seeking to significantly ramp up its current urban portfolio of some \$5bn in the region, and increase both its investments, and their impacts. This provides for a huge opportunity to re-think how money is invested in the urban space and to ensure that the considerable capital investments of the World Bank and other development agencies are better targeted to meet the objective of maximizing the opportunity of urbanization.

The CA Secretariat would have an active role supporting the country programming track captured in objective 3 above, ensuring effective CA member participation in the programmatic track, and for mobilizing resources for implementation of the plan. Joint work programmes would be developed with the Bank and other CA members for implementation of activities

The action plan would not be compiled as a one off consultancy but would be developed as a "knowledge process" centered on a number of themes. The themes have emerged after wide discussion with national and city officials and include:

1. The nexus between decentralization and urbanization, promoting African cities and towns to increasingly manage themselves;
2. Promoting the economic role of African cities through identifying existing constraints, promoting the recognition of the informal sector, and connecting cities to markets;

3. Recognizing the changing dynamics of urban poverty, particularly the growth of slums, the need to give voice and space to the urban poor, and the imperative of employment opportunities;
4. Understanding the link between climate change and coastal cities and how to adapt and mitigate;
5. Recognizing the unique role and challenges that cities face in fragile states.
6. The opportunity to introduce new sustainable technologies (including energy and water) that kick start new linkages into the economy and resolve existing problems.

The “knowledge process” around these themes, would include:

- Dialogue with African country and city stakeholders and CA members to define key issues within each thematic area such as cities and fragile states that require further evidence and investigation;
- Exchange and learning between cities and countries that have faced, and are facing, similar challenges
- Commissioned analytical work to delve into defined issues; and
- Conferences, seminars and workshops to discuss findings and refine directions of the Action Plan.

The outputs of this Action Plan would include:

- 1) Improved analysis and evidence of major trends on cities, poverty, social and economic development;
- 2) A robust pipeline of investments informed by the outcomes of the knowledge process.
- 3) Improved potential for partnerships among CA members and other development partners through greater knowledge of actors in the urban sector and a shared understanding of the key urban challenges.
- 4) The convening of international networks of actors and organizations operating in the urban space and the linkage, where appropriate, of such networks to CA member activities to increase spread and scale with a special focus on capacity building and voice of the urban poor.
- 5) Expanded and improved city-to-city cooperation.

Outcomes of the Action Plan include:

- Members of the Cities Alliance have a wider and deeper understanding of urban challenges enabling each member organization to either confirm programmatic direction or re-align where appropriate to the urban challenges as identified.
- Improved opportunities (services, employment and voice) for urban poor.
- Improved capacity in African local government, community organizations;
- Mobilized and sustained focus of the major development agencies on urbanization in Africa; and
- Improved content and systems of African planning and urban management related universities and institutes.