

Promoting Good Urban Governance and Planning in Africa: Implications for the NEPAD Agenda

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Abstract

Poverty and rapid urbanization are two of the greatest challenges facing Africa today, and cities provide an appropriate platform for advancing the NEPAD mandate to alleviate poverty, promote good governance, and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The paper discusses how cities and urban slums have developed in Africa over the last 50 years, the extent to which government policies have helped or constrained the poor, and the appropriate strategies to protect urban livelihood for the poor, and also ensure a healthy and socially acceptable environment. It then examines the NEPAD Cities Programme, which seeks to develop African cities as engines of economic growth, and nodes of regional integration. It argues that in spite of continuing misgivings, NEPAD provides a potentially useful framework for dialogue between African leaders and the external collaborating partners. The NEPAD peer review mechanism (APRM) can effectively guide member countries in the reciprocal evaluation meant to help them to fulfill the commitment to peace and good governance, and to learn from each other best practices in various areas of governance, planning, informal sector management, and so on. To realize its full potential NEPAD needs to draw insights from several recent global initiatives, including the Habitat Agenda, ILO's Decent Work Agenda, UN-Habitat's twin Campaigns for Good Urban Governance and Secure Tenure, etc - which suggest how state and local authorities, the private sector and civil society organizations, the international development community and the urban poor themselves should collaborate to promote the growth of safe, productive, inclusive and socially equitable cities.

Introduction

Many advocates of NEPAD present it as "the most important advance in development thinking for Africa in the past 40 years" because of its commitment to the promotion of peace, good governance and poverty alleviation. The current urban crisis in Africa constitutes a major challenge to the NEPAD initiative, and also provides it with an appropriate platform for advancing the effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Indeed one of the primary concerns of the MDGs is to urgently improve the lives of millions of slum dweller around the world, and to reduce the number of people without reliable access to good drinking water and sanitation.(UN-Habitat, 2003) It is widely recognized that the laudable objectives of NEPAD are unlikely to be fully realized without the successful urbanization of the continent, with cities functioning as engines of economic growth and nodes of regional integration. The paper examines the response of NEPAD to Africa's worsening urban crisis, paying special attention to the NEPAD Cities Programme.

The Urban Challenge

Africa is the world's most rapidly urbanizing continent, with an urban growth rate which is double the rate of overall population growth, and double the urban growth rate of Asia and Latin America. The total urban population is expected to exceed 200 million by the year 2020. Unlike the historical experience of Europe and North America, this extremely rapid rate of urbanization is occurring in the context of widespread poverty, and ahead of the development of the requisite institutions for managing and providing for the cities properly. Almost everywhere in Africa, urban conditions have grown from bad to worse. Good quality housing is scarce and very expensive. The continent has a staggering 166 million slum dwellers, most of whom find themselves in the informal sector, and simply do not earn enough to afford decent shelter and services. (Population Report, 2002; AMCHUD, 2005). The supply of water for personal and domestic hygiene is grossly

inadequate, and so is the coverage of sanitation facilities. The state of waste management and drainage is appalling, and food contamination and poisoning occur frequently, especially in the extensive street food industry. This state of affairs has serious adverse public health implications, as seen in the high incidence of water-borne and filth related disease.(Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1990; WHO 1992). The major policy questions appear to be the appropriate role of government vis-à-vis the formal and informal private sectors in housing provision; the question of access to affordable land and housing, and the adoption of appropriate and realistic building codes, standards and technologies that are compatible with local conditions.

Past Approaches and Emerging New Trends:

Many of the prevailing anti-urban prejudices and policies in Africa today arise from the unhappy legacy of colonialism. Although many African cities owe their growth largely to the activities generated by European presence, colonial officials tended to view cities as an unfortunate and unintended by-product of colonial activities which had to be firmly contained in order to avoid political subversion and social disorganization. The policies and institutions for urban governance and planning were very restrictive, myopic and ineffective. As a result the rapid urban expansion of the post-independence period has quickly overtaken and overwhelmed the local institutions and capacity to cope with the crisis of inadequate shelter and services, unemployment and the worsening deterioration of the urban environment. Unfortunately, successive post-colonial governments have tended to endorse the idea of 'urban bias' which blames rural problems on urban growth. Sometimes policies to improve urban conditions have been sought indirectly through migration control and other policies to contain or reverse the trend of urbanization. (Nwaka, 1996; AMCHUD, 2005) But this approach has not only failed to stop the inevitable and irreversible process of urbanization, but has created a policy vacuum that has allowed the cities to grow in a disorderly way, and for urban problems to accumulate. For many African governments the policy dilemma appears to be how best to contain the adverse health and environmental effects of slums and irregular settlements without disrupting the livelihood of the poor. Some have adopted the misguided policy that tries to outlaw and repress the informal sector, and to forcibly evict hundreds of thousands of so called 'squatters'. This was the case in Nigeria during the so called 'War Against Environmental Indiscipline' under the Military, and more recently the 'Operation Restore Order' in Zimbabwe which provoked wide international condemnation

Current research suggests that the path to urban sustainability in Africa lies in trying to build and manage more inclusive and socially equitable cities; to upgrade and integrate existing slums and anticipate and prevent the development of future slums.. This would involve revising the large number of regulations and bureaucratic procedures from different levels of government that tend to stifle initiative, and to inhibit the realization of the full potential of the informal sector and the poor in the development of the cities.(Fernandes and Varley, 1998; McAuslan, 1992). As well, there is growing international consensus that the crisis of governance in developing countries is at the heart of the worsening urban crisis. The UN Secretary General has emphasized that "Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and in promoting sustainable development". A number of recent global initiatives, arising from the UN conferences of the 1990s, point to possible new ways to achieve urban sustainability in Africa. These include the Earth Summit Rio and the Human Settlement dimension of Agenda 21; the Habitat Agenda, the UN-Habitat Campaigns for Good Urban Governance and Secure Tenure; the ILO's Decent Work Agenda; the WHO's Healthy Cities Programme, and the World Bank sponsored Cities Alliance for Cities Without Slums.

The NEPAD Agenda, and the NEPAD Cities Programme:

The NEPAD initiative has generated considerable debate on the priorities and direction of African development. Critics, especially civil society organizations, are skeptical about the relevance of the NEPAD idea, and whether the present leadership of the continent has the commitment and the appropriate political culture to implement the project. Many complain that NEPAD is elitist; that its goals and programmes are donor-driven, and that it may in fact be unwittingly endorsing and promoting the neo-liberal economic agenda of the West.. They emphasize the need to consult more widely within Africa, to engage local and international civil society groups more fully,

and to strengthen popular ownership and participation in the NEPAD project. On the other hand NEPAD advocates argue that the new initiative seeks a better deal and a well coordinated approach to African development(Adesina et al, 2006; Kanbur, 2002; Maloka, 2004). Partnership is central to the NEPAD idea - partnership between African governments and their people, including civil society organizations; partnership between and among African governments themselves; and partnership between African governments and the foreign collaborating partners as well as with the international development community. The NEPAD peer review process (APRM) is meant to create a platform for national self-assessment, and for national dialogue among various stakeholders on governance and development issues. APRM is a voluntary commitment of African member countries to subject themselves to reciprocal evaluation in respect of the extent to which they have tried to put their houses in order; their commitment to cultivate democratic and transparent ways of managing their economic and political affairs; the priority they place on human development and poverty alleviation, and so on. The system is designed not as a penalizing measure, but as a way to encourage member states to learn from each other's good conduct and best practices in the various areas of good governance and sustainable development. It must be emphasized that the initiative is still in its early years.. Only about 24 of Africa's 53 states have signed up to be peer reviewed, and only four or so (Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya and Mauritius) have undergone the peer review process.(UN-ECA,2005)

The plan to establish the NEPAD Cities Programme represents the concern of African leaders and governments to take up the urbanization agenda at the continental level, and to develop a concerted framework of action to guide the urban development initiatives of individual countries, and reinforce the quest for closer African integration. With technical support from UN-Habitat and the African Population Council, the initiative has established a model of what an ideal African city should be – a city that is functional, economically productive, socially inclusive, environmentally safe and sound, and with a balanced relationship to the hinterland. Seven pilot cities were selected for implementing the project:

Table 1 : Cities Selected for the start up of NEPAD Cities Programme

Serial No.	CITY SELECTED	REGIONAL BLOCK	ECONOMIC COMMUNITY
1	Rabat	Northern Africa	UMA
2	Bamako	Western Africa (French)	ECOWAS
3	Lagos	Western Africa (English)	ECOWAS
4	Durban	Southern Africa	SADC, COMESA
5	Lusaka	Southern Africa	SADC, COMESA
6	Douala	Central Africa	ECCAS
7	Nairobi	Eastern Africa	EAC, IGAD

The first Consultative Forum of the member cities was convened in Lagos in May 2004 for them to dialogue, compare notes on their respective 'profiles', that identify their major problems, priorities and strategies. The Forum established the NEPAD Cities Award for good performance – as a contribution of the municipalities to the African peer review process(AMCHUD, 2005). .

Conclusion

NEPAD recognizes that the ultimate responsibility for improved urban planning and governance lies at the local level, and that municipal authorities are better placed than distant central and regional governments to foster the constructive collaboration among the various stakeholders in urban development. To play this role effectively local governments need improved technical, administrative and financial capacity through genuine decentralization and increased support from national and international development agencies. To create a supportive and enabling environment state and regional governments for their part need to continuously review and update existing legislation in respect of urban planning, building standards, infrastructure and environmental regulations etc, in order to make them more realistic, attainable and compatible with local conditions. As poverty remains a major urban concern, the urban poor and informal sector enterprises should better organize and self-regulate themselves in order to engage more

constructively with government and other development partners. Non-state actors and civil society organizations should also take advantage of the NEPAD framework to hold their political leaders and governments accountable, and in so doing promote the ideals of equitable and inclusive development which they advocate.. Finally, since resolving the urban crisis is central to Africa's economic renewal, there is an urgent need for the international development community to genuinely address the global economic context of underdevelopment, and the structural roots of urban poverty in Africa. Only then will NEPAD be able to realize its full potential.

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