



UN HABITAT



THE STATE OF AFRICAN CITIES 2010

MILLIONS OF AFRICANS AT RISK FROM SEA LEVEL RISE

warns UN-HABITAT's new report, *The State of African Cities 2010: Governance, Inequality and Urban Land Markets*.

More than 25 per cent of Africa's population of about one billion people lives within 100 km from the coast. With climate change, many will be at risk from sea level rise and coastal flooding over the coming decades.

According to the new UN-HABITAT report, *State of African Cities 2010*, Africa will suffer disproportionately from the negative effects of climate change despite contributing less than 5 per cent of global green house emissions.

"Already confronted by innumerable problems related to economic development and urbanisation, African countries have to now address the negative effects of climate change despite being minimal contributors to green house emissions. The slums of African cities are already witnessing increased numbers of environmental refugees," said Joan Clos, Executive Director of UN-HABITAT. "Whatever the reasons, this is the time to act. African cities can adopt measures to reduce vulnerability and mitigation measures should be put in place. With strategic urban planning that improves slums and rationalizes urban mobility and energy consumption, cities can be part of the solution."

Already beaches and dune ridges along some African coasts show evidence of retreat, varying from between a loss of about 1 to 2 metres annually in Senegal to between 20 and 30 metres along the Gulf of Guinea. The Dakar coast, for instance, with 50,000 individuals per square km, is one of the most densely populated in Western Africa, and a storm surge disaster could easily affect 75,000 residents.

While climate variability is not a new factor in Africa's history, the report points out that the incidence and severity of extreme weather events, including floods and droughts, has increased sharply in recent years and projections indicate that this trend may intensify, further increasing vulnerability. Burkina Faso, for instance, experienced the heaviest rains in 90 years in 2009, leaving 150,000 people homeless.

Other parts of Africa recently suffered prolonged droughts and subsequent hunger, leading to rural-urban emigration, adding even more people to the urban populations at risk.

URBAN FOOTPRINTS & ENVIRONMENTAL LOSSES

The authors of the report argue that the trends of environmental losses in African coastal regions and rain forests are worrisome. They point out that environmental degradation in and around African cities and their environmental footprints are closely associated with the incidence of poverty.

For instance, the high cost of electricity and lack of urban livelihoods accelerate deforestation; the land is used

for food production and its fuel wood for cooking. Extensive fuel wood use is a matter of the widespread failure to provide African cities with energy security. Urban energy security is critical for economic growth and poverty alleviation, but over 550 million people, more than half of all Africans, lack access to electricity, despite the continent's huge hydro and geothermal potential. The DRC, for instance, has a 150,000 MW hydro-electric capacity - three times Africa's current power consumption. The report argues that providing all African urban dwellers with sufficient energy is a clear component of sustainable development that has not yet been fully explored.

Cities, through their high population and human activities concentrations, are significant generators of carbon emissions and therefore major contributors to climate change. Municipalities, with their regulation, land use planning and taxation roles, should become the key actors in addressing climate change. Local authorities have the closest link with the population, enabling them to stimulate behaviour change among businesses and citizens.

The 2010/11 State of African Cities Report: Governance, Inequality and Urban Land Markets was prepared in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme with funding from the Government of Norway.

URBAN PLANNING: KEY TO ADDRESSING THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Fortunately, according to the report, many African central governments are starting to be involved in addressing the impacts of climate change through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

However, local authorities are severely lagging in this respect and hardly have any policies or programmes in place for urban-specific adaptation strategies, despite the fact that cities contain much of the national population and the overwhelming share of national assets.

Past and current urban planning has promoted highly dispersed and sprawling cities with often long commuting distances between housing on the urban peripheries or beyond and centrally located work, shops and schools. Poor public transport and a bias towards private cars, which are often poorly maintained, are features of all the cities in the region that significantly contribute to fossil fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions. More attention should go to urban designs that reduce mobility demand.

Rail systems and other public transportation modes are effective in reducing urban carbon emissions. They have in recent years experienced declines in passenger numbers, largely due to poor service, poor safety and a lack of integration with other transport modes. High quality and reliable public mass transport is required to reduce urban reliance on private vehicles. Urban public mass transportation must also cater for the wealthy who contribute much more per capita to emissions with their private vehicles than the poor.

THE WAY FORWARD

The authors of the report call upon central and local governments to set an example and become much 'greener' in their actions and decision-making by promoting:

- City, neighbourhood and building designs that prioritise energy efficiency and make more use of clean and renewable energy sources;
- Urban planning towards more multi-nuclear cities that facilitate shorter commutes and urban mobility based on walking, cycling and public transportation, including light rail connections between (peri-)urban residential and central business areas;
- Use of private vehicles should be discouraged through pricing, taxation and/or restriction of vehicular access to city centres during specific hours of the day, supported by better public transportation options;
- Environment-sensitive legislation that promotes renewable energy technologies in industry, public and residential buildings and generally integrating 'green' policies in municipal by-laws that promote 'green' entrepreneurship;
- City managers must set the example through climate change-compliant decision-making and municipal procurement strategies that give priority to climate change adaptation and mitigation;
- Municipality pooling in services and 'green' technology procurement can generate cost savings while creating a critical mass of demand for novel products and services.

