ANNEX III

FIELD VISIT TO THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA
BY THE COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES TO UN-HABITAT
23-24 FEBRUARY 2015

Background Information

Background

Sustainable urbanization is a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable socio-economic development and a necessary foundation for agriculturally dependent low income countries to transition towards middle income status, which is already a key element of Rwanda’s national vision. This encompasses urbanization processes from small market towns to secondary and capital cities with clearly well planned urban-rural linkages.

In developed economies urbanization was preceded by industrial development which served as a driver of economic growth and prosperity and enabled planned urban growth while in much of Africa, urbanization is taking place in the absence of an industrial transformation, amidst widespread poverty and in a spontaneous and unplanned manner.

Rwanda recognizes and has fully embraced urbanization as a key driver of socio-economic transformation as well elaborated in its Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy II and Vision 2020. As an already rapidly urbanizing nation, Rwanda targets to become a middle-income country with 35% of the national population being urban by 2020, which implies a doubling of the current urban population.

Besides increasing economic growth, being the African country with the highest population density (comparable to developed countries like South-Korea or the Netherlands), the country faces serious challenges regarding land-use per capita (large plots) and inefficient agriculture. Sustainable urbanization has the potential to reduce the land consumption per capita and balance urban and rural growth.

In May 2014, His Excellency President Paul Kagame was a keynote speaker for the first Integration Segment of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) focused on sustainable urbanization attended by high ranking dignitaries from around the world. In his statement, President Kagame emphasized the importance of harnessing the transformative potential of urbanization and Rwanda’s commitment towards this stating that “the choice is not whether to urbanise or not. The issue is whether we manage it in such a way that we obtain, together with our citizens, the maximum benefits possible”.

In September 2013, Rwanda hosted 51 countries from the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group to attend the ACP/ European Commission/UN-Habitat international conference entitled “Sustainable Urbanization as Response to Poverty Eradication in ACP countries- Slum Upgrading and Community Empowerment”. The Ministers, Parliamentarians, Mayors and urban experts present committed to take advantage of the transformative potential of well-planned and managed urbanization as a driver of sustainable development, including through proactive leadership and inclusive governance for slum prevention and upgrading.
Furthermore, the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Dr. Joan Clos, sought His Excellency President Paul Kagame’s support to continue showcasing the role of urbanization as a key driver of socio-economic transformation, especially in developing countries which the President welcomed. Indeed, if guided and managed appropriately, urbanization enables countries to optimize the urban economic advantage and facilitate investment, trade and business, maximize human capital development and realize efficient utilization of natural resources.

As Rwanda is landlocked and shares borders with many countries, urban development in should always be considered from a regional and international level as well. Cross border trade with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Tanzania and Burundi influences the spatial economic development of the country as well as the infrastructure needed to connect cities within the country and beyond. Continuous dialogue with the East African community about infrastructural development gives direction to developments.

Also, Rwanda’s spatial-economic configuration is characterized by small and medium size human settlements (10-100 thousand inhabitants) that function together as a large urban area. It is likely that most of the cities will not grow beyond a medium size in the long run, but rather function collectively as a whole. Complementarity and continuous dialogue at the local level is therefore critical for sustainable urban development.

**Government of Rwanda and UN-Habitat partnership**

The Government of the Republic of Rwanda and UN-Habitat have enjoyed a long and fruitful partnership of 20 years in support of sustainable cities and human settlements development. Soon after 1994, UN-Habitat supported the resettlement and reintegration of returnees through land plotting and rehabilitation and reconstruction of housing and public and communal infrastructure and buildings.

Since 2004, UN-Habitat’s activities in Rwanda have focused on supporting institutional capacity building, provision of technical advisory services to key government institutions, preparation of specific socio-environmental assessment and development of key urban policies and regulations. Following the implementation of the Delivering as One United Nations Reform in Rwanda from January 2008 onwards, UN-Habitat has been contributing to numerous interventions under this framework.

In addition, UN-Habitat has been partnering with the Government of Rwanda in the areas of youth empowerment and engagement, slum upgrading, water and sanitation and urban energy efficiency, among others. For instance, the Kigali One Stop Youth Centre established with support from UN-Habitat has impacted youth empowerment substantially with 27 districts intending to replicate the model from 2014 onwards. Through the One Stop model, the introduction of the fourth pillar (Productivity and Youth Employment) under the national Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy was lobbied for successfully.

In support of the Rwanda’s vision for maximizing the transformational potential of urbanization, UN-Habitat signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government in 2012 for the development of a National Urbanization Policy and support to urban planning and design in secondary cities as well as Kigali. This is being complemented by specific plans for city extensions accommodating future growth and foster economic productivity and investment whilst insuring inclusivity. The partnership falls under the framework of UN-Habitat’s Achieving Sustainable Urban
Development (ASUD) programme piloted in 5 countries globally and jointly implemented in Rwanda by the Ministry of Infrastructure, Rwanda Housing Authority and UN-Habitat. The programme is further serving as an important platform for dialogue and exchange of knowledge and best practices amongst government and other stakeholders.

The development of a National Urbanization Policy, UN-Habitat’s support to understand and develop a spatial-economic strategy on a regional scale and the improvement of urban planning processes at the local level will substantially facilitate the realization of Rwanda’s long term vision for enhancing the role of urbanization as driver of socio-economic development. This is relevant in view of ongoing deliberations on defining the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in 2016 where the world will agree on a New Urban Agenda to guide urbanization as a key foundation of sustainable development also constitutes an opportunity for Rwanda to contribute further to global and regional debates.

Field visit to Rwanda by the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UN-Habitat

- Against the above background, in a letter from Dr. Joan Clos, Executive Director, UN-Habitat to Honorable James Musoni, Minister, MININFRA, a field visit to Rwanda by CPR members was proposed and subsequently accepted by Honorable Musoni from.

- The visit will take place from 23 to 24 February 2015. It will serve as a key platform for sharing enhanced awareness about the role of urbanization in development, practical experience, best practices and knowledge in Rwanda.

- The CPR periodically undertakes field visits to countries where UN-Habitat is implementing programmes in support of sustainable cities and human settlements, as a component of its technical cooperation portfolio at national and local levels.

- Rwanda is an ideal country for the field visit given the country’s vision and commitment to enhance the role of urbanization as a pillar of national development as well as the significant progress it has made to date in promoting inclusive governance, peace and security and sustainable development, including in partnership with UN-Habitat.

- In particular, it would be timely and relevant to showcase progress made by the Government of Rwanda with respect to the following:

  → Conflict: facilitating transformation from conflict to sustainable development with urbanization as a key pillar of progress
  → Ecological fragility: facilitating sustainable urbanization in an ecologically fragile environment faced with disaster risks
  → From poverty to prosperity: nurturing inclusive development transitioning from poverty towards investment and job creation

- Tentatively, a two day visit entailing engagement with key government officials and site visits to projects in the cities of Kigali and Rubavu is proposed. Specifically, in Kigali, it is proposed that the CPR meets with the relevant government officials and the UN Resident Coordinator and also visits
key projects related to youth empowerment, slum upgrading and resettlement. In Rubavu it is proposed that CPR meets with key government officials and received briefings on the city’s master plan and implementation studies.

- It is expected that while CPR members cover expenses related to international travel and accommodation in Rwanda, the Government of Rwanda is expected to handle local transportation and hosting of a cocktail during the field visit.

Optional activities

Rwanda has many tourist attractions and cultural highlights that can be visited. Two of the best known are the Genocide Memorial in Kigali and the Mountain Gorillas in the Virunga National Park. CPR members could visit these after the official programme has finished.

A visit to the Genocide Memorial can be organized in cooperation with the Rwandan Government. A visit to the Mountain Gorillas can further be facilitated through the Rwandan Development Board (RDB) as the daily number of visitors is limited and bookings need to be made well in advance. The standard price for a visit is 750 USD.