

Cities and Urban Areas: Collaborative Action by Commonwealth Organisations

Discussion note – DRAFT

1. Introduction

This note has been prepared following discussion at the IFCO meeting on the 1 June 2018 when it was agreed to develop ideas around the potential for a cluster of organisations around the themes of human settlements / urban areas.

2. Challenges and opportunities

The UN's SDGs provide the global framework for helping achieve a sustainable future for human society. The ability to meet the SDGs is becoming increasingly challenging due to the continuing rapid exponential growth of the world's cities and other urban settlements. As mankind increasingly focusses its activities in cities the pressures become even more acute requiring increasingly innovative and comprehensive ways to address the SDGs. As acknowledged at the World Urban Forum in Naples in September 2012, *"The battle for a more sustainable future will be won or lost in cities"*.

The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth recognises that *'Cities are one of the drivers of economic growth'* and acknowledges the challenges posed by rapid urbanisation and the need to build capacity, strengthen built environment policy and develop approaches which are of practical use by communities and city leaders throughout the Commonwealth.

The growth of the world's cities is phenomenal – today over 54% of the global population live in urban areas (42% in 1990) – this is expected to increase to 66% by 2050. Cities provide the potential for individuals and mankind more broadly to fulfil their aspirations within the context of a sustainable future. Yet with over half of the growth of cities being in slum settlements with little or no physical or social infrastructure and massive pressures being placed on existing infrastructure the ability of cities to achieve their true potential is hugely challenging.

Recent research by the Marram Institute at New York University has put into sharp focus the nature of the urban crisis being experienced in many parts of the world. This work has shown the pace and geography of urban growth and demonstrated that the nature of that growth in the form of increasing urban spread at lower densities combined with decreasing ability to access public transport is generating city structures which challenges sustainability principles.

There is an international drive to innovation in prosecuting SDG11, including:

- Smart Cities (<https://www.techrepublic.com/article/smart-cities-6-essential-technologies/>) including smart energy, smart transportation, smart data, smart infrastructure, smart mobility, smart IoT (Internet of Things) devices
- The New Urban Agenda (<http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/Habitat-III-New-Urban-Agenda-10-September-2016.pdf>)
- Rural-urban migration

- Participatory governance
- Coastal urbanisation and the Blue Economy
- Balancing policy-led, market-led and community-led development
- The right to housing and sanitation in the context of upgrading informal settlements
- Building capacity, in supply of relevant professional skills, drawing on the Curriculum Framework for Sustainable Development
- Parks in Cities, including green corridors for pedestrians and cyclists, to enhance mental and physical wellbeing, and children's safety and play in the city
(http://www.worldurbanparks.org/images/Documents/SalzburgGlobal_574_Parks-for-the-Planet_Session-Brochure_170112.pdf)
- Planning for rapid urbanisation- toolkit for mayors and urban practitioners.

3. Achieving a Commonwealth Cities and Urban Areas focus

The challenge for society is to harness city growth in ways that steer towards a more sustainable future and a higher quality of life for all. This requires coordinated action within effective governance structures and across the wide range of stakeholders whose skills are needed to achieve effective and sustainable city growth.

All Commonwealth organisations have a stake in the future of our cities and urban areas. Working together Commonwealth civil society organisations and other Commonwealth organisations have an excellent opportunity to show how cities and urban areas have potential to create a sustainable future - there is potential for the Commonwealth to show global leadership.

Members of IFCO could consider how they can best collaborate to ensure that the value and contribution cities and urban areas can make towards achieving a sustainable future is fully recognised across the Commonwealth including by governments leaders at future CHOGMs.

There are a number of ways of achieving this collaboration, but one suggestion is the establishment of a '**Commonwealth Cities Group**' (or similar title) which would bring together those organisations which wish to develop thinking and strategy in this area. Participants in such a group could include those with interests in law, governance, business, health, education, justice, gender, equality, culture, age (young / aged) and the built environment.

Such a group could focus in a number of areas such as:

- Developing an evidence base on state of Commonwealth Cities (providing data for SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities:
<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-11-sustainable-cities-and-communities.html>)
- Sourcing funding for research / initiatives
- Cities in vulnerable areas including small island states, particularly urbanisation and resilience in coastal communities
- Developing ideas for effective strategy for Commonwealth leadership, at all levels
- Influencing Commonwealth leaders through CHOGMs and reintroduction of a renewed Commonwealth Consultative Group for Human Settlements (CCGHS) in the wings of UN Habitat meetings

- Identifying and promoting innovation including experiments with new technologies: renewable energy; use of drones and satellites for mapping to address tenure rights; a multidisciplinary approach to join up the water-energy-food nexus and to integrate urbanisation into a One Planet Health framework
- Liaising with key UN bodies including UN Habitat and other organisations with a city focus
- Developing a 'Commonwealth Cities Hub' (or similar title) for cities related data etc..

4. An example of collaborative working by Commonwealth built environment associations

The roles of built environment professionals are clearly closely related to cities and urban areas. However recent surveys (1) by the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP) and the Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA) have revealed severe shortages of urban planners and architects across the Commonwealth with the shortage being most acute in those countries where urban challenges are most severe. If ways are found to address these shortages then urban growth can be expected to contribute more to a sustainable future for all. In response to this CAP and CAA together with the Commonwealth Engineers Council (CEC) have recently committed to collaborate with one another to help build capacity amongst the built environment professions throughout the Commonwealth. Further, obvious participants would include the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), the Commonwealth Association of Surveying and Land Economy (CASLE) as well as those from other, related sectors.

5. Next Steps

It is suggested that these ideas (including the suggested Commonwealth Cities Group) be discussed at the next IFCO. If there is support for this initiative then a team be established to take the thinking forward.

22 July 2018

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including agreed amendments from Nicholas Watts 5 September 2018

1. https://issuu.com/comarchitect.org/docs/caa_survey_of_the_architectural_pro,
<https://www.commonwealth-planners.org/planning-for-rapid-urbanisation>