

17 March 2022

4D – Dialogues on Demographic Diversity and Dividends

Urbanization and Demographic Dividend(s)

Introduction

By 2050, the global urban population is projected to rise to 6.7 billion from 4.4 billion today. Urbanization is fastest in Africa, where the number of city residents is expected to triple in the next thirty years. If well-managed, urbanization has enormous potential to help countries accelerate the demographic transition and realize demographic dividends. Fertility rates tend to be considerably lower in urban areas – for example, women in cities in Sub-Saharan Africa give birth to 1.5 fewer children on average than those in the countryside. Policies for inclusive urbanization can provide families with essential services, contributing to increased well-being and quality of life and enabling fertility declines. For example, children often live close to schools and are more likely to complete their education, meaning that they have better perspectives later in life and go on to have fewer children themselves. Cities can also provide greater employment opportunities than rural areas, particularly for women. They are hubs of social change towards greater gender equality in which women are empowered to make independent decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

Yet rapid urban population growth often goes unmanaged and many households are excluded from the opportunities that cities provide. As a result, countries are often unable to harness the potential of urbanization for demographic and socio-economic development. In developing countries, one in three urban residents lives in informal settlements – also called slums – without access to basic services. Women are typically overrepresented in slums and face particular marginalization. They are often affected by poor sanitation and lack access to sexual and reproductive health. Many women face harassment and discrimination in public spaces and are restricted in their mobility, meaning that they have trouble reaching essential health services. In many slums, few children attend school regularly. Instead, they work in the informal economy, selling goods or carrying out cheap services. They then tend to marry earlier, have worse job opportunities and go on to have more children. That leads to persistent high fertility levels in informal settlements, placing additional strain on local governments to provide adequate healthcare, education, housing and jobs. Sustainable urban planning should therefore focus on inclusive services for all, particularly to the most vulnerable households and accelerate the demographic transition.

The Cairo Program of Action in 1994 highlighted the challenges posed by rapid urbanization and called on governments to introduce inclusive urban planning structures at the local level, thereby contributing to socio-economic development. The New Urban Agenda from 2016 also recognized sustainable urbanization as a key driver of socioeconomic and demographic development. Moreover, the 25th International Conference on Population and Development in Nairobi in 2019 emphasized the potential to integrate SRH in Sustainable Development Goal 11, calling for “Sustainable Cities and Communities”. Similarly, the African Union’s Agenda 2063 identified the nexus between urbanization, industrialization, social transformation and economic development as key to people-centered structural transformation in African countries.

Needs for Action

- **Collect disaggregated data on urban residents**

To ensure that urban populations receive the services and infrastructure they need, local governments require quality data. They should therefore build capacities to collect data, particularly of large populations living in informal settlements. By disaggregating data by age, sex and other demographic indicators, urban planners can identify different groups' needs for essential services. Reliable evidence also enables cities to regularly evaluate the success of urban policies.

- **Create inclusive public spaces for all**

Cities should provide an urban environment that enables community interaction and free expression – regardless of gender, ethnicity, migrant status, income, age or disability. That means investing in well-lit, safe, vibrant and accessible public spaces. Moreover, governments must combat established norms that often lead to harassment and violence in cities, preventing people – especially women and girls – from participating in their local communities. All residents are then better able to contribute to urban political, social and economic life.

- **Generate urban employment opportunities for youth**

City councils should invest in training and entrepreneurship programs to help young people acquire the skills they need to enter the workforce. They should also support the development of industries that can provide well-paying jobs in the formal sector to absorb the millions of young people entering urban labor markets annually. Otherwise, urban youth are at particular risk of unemployment.

- **Guarantee land rights for women**

To reduce urban gender inequality and poverty, cities should ensure that women have the same access to property as men. Legal systems should recognize women's right to own and inherit land. In many African cities, women head up to one in four households – yet they are often excluded from owning property due to entrenched gender norms and patriarchal laws and have no claim on their homes if they get divorced or their husbands pass away. That makes it hard for them to support themselves and their families.

- **Provide health care to all urban residents**

Local governments must integrate programs for healthcare in urban planning. As cities expand rapidly, governments must ensure that residents have equitable access to quality health services, safe water and sanitation and effective sexual and reproductive health services. In particular, they must respond to the needs of slum populations, who often live in particularly unsanitary conditions and may have trouble affording treatment.

- **Foster climate resilience of vulnerable groups**

Climate change adaptation and mitigation policies should consider the differentiated vulnerabilities of diverse groups to ensure that no one is left behind. Women, migrant groups, the old and poor households are often most at risk: They often live in areas that are particularly exposed to climate hazards and have fewer resources to respond to damages. Effective urban climate policies should, for example, make flood shelters easily accessible for women with children or the old who may be less mobile, invest in safe housing for people in informal settlements and engage citizens in planning processes to respond to diverse needs for greater resilience.

- **Integrate urban and rural development**

National policy agendas need to support greater integration of cities and their surroundings. Urban residents depend on efficient supply chains and infrastructure in order to access goods from outside the city, such as nutritious food or clean water. At the same time, people who have moved to cities often send remittances to their families in the countryside. This supports poor families across the country and enables socioeconomic and demographic development in both urban and rural areas. By investing in a smooth flow of goods, money and people between cities and the countryside, governments can nurture balanced development across their countries.

Best practices

Cities face numerous challenges in providing inclusive services for their populations. Urban policy-makers can learn from successful interventions elsewhere to plan cities in a way that contributes to harnessing demographic dividends.

- **The Femmedina Project – urban spaces for women in Tunis, Tunisia**

Although Tunisia has one of the highest levels of gender equality in Africa, patriarchal norms still dictate much of everyday life. Women often feel unsafe and experience harassment, particularly in the evenings when the poorly lit streets of the city center – the medina – are empty. This restricts their ability to participate in political, economic and social activities. The first female mayor of Tunis has put inclusion of women in public spaces at the center of her policies. With support from USAID, the Femmedina project engages women in participatory, gender-sensitive planning processes for new urban projects. They include improved street lighting, more public toilets for women or redesigned parks in which women can relax and interact.

- **Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative, Nigeria**

The non-governmental organization (NGO) Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI) offers a range of programs for adolescents in cities across Nigeria, including Lagos and Abuja. It organizes workshops in which they can discuss issues concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights in a youth-friendly way. The organization uses sport to engage young people, combining football with awareness-raising on issues such as HIV/Aids, contraception and gender-based violence. It also trains young people as agents of change in their communities and provides access

to support services. YEDI has operated different programs for over ten years and reached over 250,000 young people.

- **Resilient city Quito, Ecuador**

Quito lies in the Andes and is vulnerable to numerous climate hazards, such as more frequent wildfires or landslides. In 2017 the city released a Resilience Strategy and joined the 100 Resilient Cities Network, a worldwide alliance in which mayors exchange experiences and develop strategies to respond to climate change. As part of the initiative, Quito has introduced a range of programs that reduce emissions, increase resilience and improve the lives of the city's population, particularly of vulnerable groups. That includes using "green infrastructure" – plants and ponds that improve air quality, protect poor and vulnerable neighborhoods from storms or heat stress and provide space for recreational activities.

- **Participatory slum upgrading, worldwide**

The Participatory Slum Upgrading Program (PSUP) is an initiative in 190 cities in more than 40 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. It was introduced by UN-Habitat and the European Commission in 2008. PSUP provides funds for basic infrastructure, such as improved water, electricity and waste disposal services. A particular focus lies on improving the situation of women, including secure land tenure for female-headed households, investing in safe urban spaces and implementing projects that train women as entrepreneurs. Among other impacts, the project estimates that it has secured land tenure for 800,000 individuals living in slums. It has also helped many of its member countries introduce or revise National Urban Policies

- **Education for Street Children, Dehradun, India**

An estimated 18 to 20 million children live on the streets of slums in large Indian cities, without a proper home. They often face extremely unsanitary conditions, malnutrition and most are out of school. The NGO "help alliance" employs social workers who actively engage street children and encourage them to join their learning centers. The program has reached over 3,000 children in the northern Indian city of Dehradun alone. The children learn key school subjects as well as computer skills for better job prospects later in life. They also receive medical care, nutritious meals and clothing.