



Partnering for a more equitable and sustainable future through Better Urban Development

Cliff Hague

Commonwealth Association of Planners

Will French

Royal Town Planning Institute

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Programme information contact:

Junaid Habib

j.habib@commonwealth.int

www.comhabitat.org

At a glance: the challenges

10 million a year – increase in Commonwealth slum dwellers.

13 Commonwealth countries that have less than a million people, and an urban settlement on the coast, are less than 10 metres above current sea level.

18% - Mumbai's share of India's economy.

20 metric tons of CO₂ are emitted per person in Canada each year. In Toronto, a city which adopted a greenhouse gas reduction target in 1989, it is only 9.6 metric tons. In poor Commonwealth countries the figure is less than 1 metric ton per person per year.

23.7 million a year – increase in Commonwealth urban population.

25% – increase in Commonwealth slum dwellers since 1999.

32 of the Commonwealth's 76 'million-plus cities' are expected to more than double in size between 2000 and 2025.

We need to partner for a more equitable and sustainable future.



House layout designs on the ground in front of houses built by the Malawi Homeless People's Federation, a network of savings collectives from poor communities.

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Let's get real about 'Partnering for a more equitable and sustainable future', the theme of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and the accompanying Commonwealth People's Forum (CPF) in Trinidad and Tobago (22-28 November 2009). Let's get so real about it that we put the fine talk into practice. Let's go beyond words and into action. It can be done. It has to be done. The Commonwealth can do it.

Do what, exactly? Create better ways of managing urban development, that's what. Governments working with Commonwealth professional associations, local governments and civil society organisations can make a difference. A Commonwealth commitment to action research and modernisation of the ways we plan and manage the Commonwealth's human settlements could show how the Commonwealth can work for ordinary people by addressing their needs – for livelihoods, housing, and security – and anxieties about climate change, economic crisis and conflict within and between communities.

This paper explains why something needs to be done. Then it shows what could be done. Finally, it sets out ideas of how to do it.

The CHOGM in difficult times

This has been called ‘the Crisis CHOGM’. Has the Commonwealth ever come together at a more worrying time? Greed and short-term thinking landed the world with an economic crisis that was not anticipated when the Commonwealth gathered in Kampala in 2007. If recovery is expected to dance to that same tune, then there will be places and people who never recover. However, if Commonwealth governments and civil society together are prepared to invest for the long term, to invest for the many and not for the few, then together we can build a ‘more equitable and sustainable future’.

The economic crisis cannot be separated from the environmental crisis. This CHOGM takes place on the eve of the climate change summit in Copenhagen. One reason why the talks leading up to Copenhagen have been difficult is that too many developed countries want a sustainable future but are shy about an equitable future. The Commonwealth demonstrates these dilemmas. There are highly developed countries with high levels of consumption and CO₂ emissions and countries where the per capita emissions are infinitesimal, but growing numbers live in poverty, finding it increasingly difficult to afford food and at risk from sea level rise or other ‘climate shocks’.

There is also a widespread popular crisis of confidence in governments and ruling groups. In extreme cases this is born out of corruption, lack of transparency and manipulation of the democratic process. More generally, governments seem distant. They make promises for elections, then struggle to implement visible improvements that matter to ordinary people. Well-intentioned Ministers can issue national edicts, but delivery requires not just resources, but also professional skills which are often in short supply. Furthermore, unless there is a pro-poor dimension, national budgets invested

in services mainly benefit those who are already better off. Statistical progress may be achieved, but the social divide can widen. Real progress has to be progress that reaches people and places on the ground.

Why cities?

What’s happening in the Commonwealth’s cities holds the key to these intertwined economic, environmental and governance crises. Cities are crucial to economic recovery. Economic activities in urban areas account for as much as 80% of GDP in more developed countries, and already about 50% in less developed countries. Lagos houses 70% of all Nigeria’s industries. Mumbai generates a sixth of India’s GDP.

Proximity to other producers gives enterprises better access to labour, goods, services, markets and ideas. Firms in similar sectors cluster together, feeding off and servicing each other. You can see it in a street market, or on a high-tech’ science park. Cities benefit workers too. That is why so many people move from rural areas to seek new urban opportunities. There are more openings for paid employment for women in cities. Urban economic growth offers the best hope of progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Too often in the Commonwealth there have been anti-urban policies, or an unplanned approach leading to severe traffic congestion, pollution, problems of solid waste, and burgeoning slums.

“If urbanisation can be managed better... significant gains can be expected in productivity and poverty reduction.... The guidance from economic geography is unambiguous: firms and workers seek agglomeration, and migration is a natural way to increase density and reduce distance to markets... policies to help leading areas exploit scale economies may be especially important in Africa as a latecomer to economic development.”
(World Bank, 2009).

A growing urban Commonwealth

New research by ComHabitat has found that:

- The Commonwealth's urban population is growing by 65,000 people a day, over 23.5 million a year. This reflects the youthful age structure of cities. It is also fuelled by rural to urban migration.
- At present there are about three-quarters of a billion people living in Commonwealth urban areas. By 2025 the figure will be almost 1.2 billion. Urban growth rates of 4% a year, as found in Gambia, Kenya, or the Solomon Islands mean that the number of urban dwellers in those countries will almost double by 2025.
- Thirty-two of the Commonwealth's 76 'million-plus cities' are expected to more than double in size between 2000 and 2025. Abuja, Dar es Salaam, Kampala, Klang, Mombasa and Nairobi will grow by more than 160%.
- However, most of the urban growth will be in smaller cities. Some small island countries face staggering scales of urban growth from 2000 to 2025: over 200% in the Maldives, 180% in the Solomon Islands and 175% in Vanuatu. Male at 111,000 is the largest city in the Maldives, but growing rapidly and threatened by rising sea levels.

As cities spread they take land, mainly from farms and forests. Unless managed properly, urban development will drink dry the reservoirs, pollute water supplies, increase run-off and risk of flooding. Massive urban growth is happening in the Commonwealth, and its pace is quickening day by day.

No fewer than 707 Commonwealth urban settlements contain land adjacent to the coast and less than 10 metres above sea level. Sea level rise makes such places vulnerable. In 2000 72.5 million Commonwealth citizens lived within this zone.

Plan and manage it well and environmental gains are possible (good public transport and pedestrian-friendly cities can reduce emissions from cars and trucks; forests can be protected by effective regulation). Allow 'business as usual' and the MDGs will be harder to deliver.

What is at stake?

ComHabitat's research has revealed that we need to change direction to achieve a more sustainable and equitable future. In May 1999, the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS) adopted the goal of 'Demonstrated progress towards adequate shelter for all with secure tenure and access to essential services in every community by 2015'. ComHabitat found that, in contrast to this aspiration, slums have grown by about a quarter in just eight years. In terms of sheer numbers of people affected, the situation is getting worse, not better. Unless changes can be made quickly and at scale, the situation in 2015 will be much worse than it was in 1999.

The number of slum dwellers in the Commonwealth is growing by around 10 million a year. By 2010 over 400 million Commonwealth citizens will be living in a slum. In Commonwealth urban areas already one person in two is a slum dweller, a higher ratio than in the rest of the world. The situation is especially acute in countries where there are already high levels of slums but also high rates of urbanisation. Understanding the dynamics of this 'slurbanisation' is essential to realisation of the Millennium Development Goals.

"Deepsea is an informal settlement in Nairobi. There is no public lighting, and no paved roads. Emergency vehicles cannot get through the alleys. Health services amount to over-the-counter purchases of medicines from a local shop. Schools lack the basics. There are 90 pupils in a class, but no tables or seats, just benches. Rosemary Wanjiku who lives there says 'Just to complete primary school requires real commitment.' When the illegal shanties are bulldozed people live in tents until they can rebuild their homes." (Hague, 2007).

The slum issue is fundamental to many Commonwealth commitments. For example, education, health, gender and human rights all have a 'slum dimension'. There are fewer schools in slums, though the median age there is typically less than 15. Children from homes that lack improved drinking water and sanitation services miss school more frequently due to a combination of poverty, poor health and lack of hygiene. Pave the roads and there's less stagnant water and risk of malaria. Girls not only suffer illness because of the lack of water and sanitation, but also often share the physical and time burden of queuing for and carrying water.

Lack of secure tenure is part of the definition of a slum. Women and those living in informal settlements are most likely to be vulnerable by this indicator. If the Commonwealth can improve the state of its cities, it can deliver on other key goals. However, if the cities continue on their present trajectory, the social, economic and environmental costs will be long-lasting.

Very often the slums are the places most vulnerable to hazards linked to extreme weather, such as flooding or hurricanes. Hazard mitigation strategies need to have a 'slum dimension' too. Reversing this slum dynamo is essential if progress is to be made on MDGs.

As Kofi Annan argued in 2006 "... the international community must concentrate more of its efforts on improving the lives of the urban poor if the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved... Without a renewed commitment to the needs of our urban era, matched by resources, the world's urban transition will see a further expansion and entrenchment of slums, and the spread of urban ills." That commitment is needed at every level, Commonwealth-wide, national, urban/regional and local.

"Under-five mortality rates in the slums of Nairobi in 2002 were 151 per 1000 live births, compared with an average of 62 for the city as a whole and just 13 for rural Kenya."
(African Population and Health Research Centre, 2002).

What could be done?

We can and must make urban development in the Commonwealth more equitable and sustainable. Through partnership focused on human settlements, the Commonwealth can contribute to tackling climate change, economic recovery, gender equality and reduction of the rate of new slum formation, which is outstripping the rate of slum upgrading. Commonwealth professionals and civil society organisations could work more closely together to share insights and information, and in particular to explore together the ways that urbanisation impacts on health, education, food security, environment, forests and climate change.

One critical starting point is to get better baseline data for Commonwealth cities. This is needed to inform policies at national and local levels, to shape interventions and to monitor results and trends. ComHabitat has confirmed that there is scope for co-operation with UN Habitat who compile the Global Urban Indicators Database. State of the Cities studies are under way for Africa and Asia, and countries such as South Africa and Nigeria. This is a concept attracting increasing international support as the significance of urban growth becomes ever clearer. Similarly, working with the Campaign on Housing Rights and Evictions could lead to greater security of tenure.

"Climate change is aggravating the problems caused by urban flooding regularly faced by poor people in African towns and cities. When faced with a flood risk, residents of marginalised but risky areas have only a limited set of adaptation options... They need help at the local community level to improve their options for emergency action and evacuation. They need help at the municipal level to improve drainage, to regulate developments upstream and elsewhere that increase flooding in their communities, and to give them greater security of tenure so that they can invest in making their homes more flood resistant. They need help at the national level; particularly to ensure that their needs are included in national disaster reduction plans and that these and other impacts of climate change are included in poverty reduction strategies. They also need international help to see that funding for adaptation to climate change is directed towards their problems."
(Prof. Ian Douglas, urban flooding expert).

In addition, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum is setting up a Commonwealth Network of Inclusive Cities, whose members will be urban or metropolitan governments. These agencies are in the 'front line' in attempts to make urban development better. Together with the baseline data initiatives and knowledge-sharing in this Network, through partnering we can create a State of the Commonwealth Cities action-research programme. This would be the evidence and learning base for the Commonwealth and its members. It would be the platform for seeking support for targeted actions through the World Bank and/or Regional Development Banks.

The State of the Commonwealth Cities action-research programme would also strengthen the evidence base for development of national urban policies. At present few Commonwealth countries have such policies. One consequence is that initiatives are taken in Ministries responsible for sectors like health, education, finance, transport or housing without appreciating their consequences for the state of the cities. By having a clear national urban policy, focussing on the role of the cities in relation to climate change, the economy and social inclusion, it would be possible to 'urban-proof' the impact of policies from other Ministries. This would improve integration, efficiency and implementation.

The State of the Commonwealth Cities needs to be an action-research programme, which can transfer knowledge and scale-up successes amongst Commonwealth cities.

“We support the idea to produce the *State of the Commonwealth Cities Report*. It is a very good initiative, and we are sure that such a Report will not only produce excellent data and information, but it will also create conditions to promote policy discussions and a fruitful exchange of ideas. The preparation of the Report would create new partnerships and strengthen the existing ones. UN Habitat would be very honored to be part of this initiative.”
(Executive Director, UN Habitat, 2009).

“One problem faced by local government is the tendency of politicians to prefer rural areas. Funds are often diverted to unviable projects in rural areas to appeal to large rural vote banks, and therefore urban infrastructure is often neglected, although this could be self-financing.”
M. Alam, *Commonwealth Ministers Reference Book 2009*.

There is a lot of know-how, much of it from civil society and bottom-up, which has simply not been tapped. We cannot afford to under-utilise the knowledge that exists within the Commonwealth family.

Of course, funding the provision and maintenance of essential urban services is a problem. However, urban growth also provides the solution. Conversion of land from rural to urban use creates a huge increase in its market value. Access to infrastructure such as roads adds value to a location. Smart approaches to land and property taxation are needed to generate revenue for Commonwealth local governments and service providers. Commonwealth expertise in urban finance, local taxation and asset management should be tapped, shared and applied.

Similarly, much could be done through an expert advisory service on planning and land management. The Commonwealth Association of Planners has led the case globally for the 'Re-invention of planning' at the UN Habitat World Urban Forum. This followed the notorious Operation Murambatsvina, ('Drive Out The Trash') in Zimbabwe in 2005 when 700,000 urban dwellers were evicted and their homes demolished.

This operation was justified by the need for 'proper planning'. Planning standards are often applied that are simply not relevant to the poor or actively discriminate against them. For example where there are requirements for minimum house plot sizes that are unattainable by the poor. The informal commercial sector, a major economic lifeline for slum dwellers, has often been ignored or criminalised by plans.

“A group of women small-scale traders living in the slums of Mpumudde, Jinja, Uganda’s second largest city, organised themselves to develop housing in partnership with actors in the public and private sector. The women, who were mainly single parents, were living in crowded conditions in poorly built rental housing, without basic water and sanitation, or recreational facilities for children. Some 20 units were built and occupied by beneficiaries. Houses are made of permanent materials, have septic tanks, and are accessible by a motor road.”
(UN Habitat 2006)

Planning systems and practices need to be modernised: too often they remain colonial legacies. Re-inventing planning is based around ten principles: sustainability; integrated planning and budgeting; planning with partners; transparent and accountable planning; subsidiarity; market responsiveness; access to land; pro-poor and inclusive; use of appropriate tools; and allowance for cultural variations in how the principles are applied. Modernisation means making planning fit for today's world, a tool to build a more equitable and sustainable future.

Gender mainstreaming is an important aspect of this new agenda. It means assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes. Thus budgeting, consultation, and evaluation of housing, employment generation schemes, community services, transport, and other physical and social infrastructure, needs to understand the implications for women and men equally and work towards greater gender equality.

“The responsibility for building institutions that will be the bedrock for urbanisation in all parts of the country lies mainly with the central government. Chief among them are those governing the management of land.”
(World Bank, 2009)



Individual water connections, Malawi
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How can it be done?

The Commonwealth is uniquely placed to become a leading partner in the global task of making urbanisation more equitable and sustainable.

No other international agency can match its institutional capacity to make the connections between global and local action, governments, professions and civil society. No other international agency can call so readily on work already being done through civil society partners. While policy making and resources are important at every scale, the nature of urban development is such that action needs to take place at local level. The shared language and legacy of similar legislation and institutions at local level is a unique selling point for the Commonwealth in this field. It confers exceptional potential for knowledge-transfer where it really counts - locally. If there is a field where the Commonwealth can punch above its weight globally, can take a lead that will resonate across the world and through the years, it is in leading better approaches to the planning and management of urbanisation.

As the box below shows, there are already assets in place.

What do we have already?

- A State of the Commonwealth Cities scoping study, largely using national data on shelter and basic services; some continental and national State of the Cities studies; willingness of UN Habitat to share data with us.
- A Commonwealth Network of Inclusive Cities, being set up by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, with a meeting in Hyderabad in January 2010.
- Relevant expertise in Commonwealth professional associations and civil society bodies, as well as in governments at different levels.

How the Commonwealth could make a difference:

- Work with UN Habitat to build a State of the Commonwealth Cities database, covering national, city-level and for some topics national urban policy statements and neighbourhood level data. The database would be used to produce regular monitoring of the Commonwealth goal on shelter, secure tenure and essential services. It would also hold and use the results of the action-research by the Network of Inclusive Cities.
- Establish a State of Commonwealth Cities contact point in each country to help access national data and provide alerts on national urban policy.
- Use the Commonwealth Network of Inclusive Cities together with other Commonwealth bodies to do action-research and act as a policy and practice exchange both between the city administrations and also between those administrations and their local civil society and professional partners.
- Draw together the Commonwealth's expertise on climate change adaptation and mitigation, re-inventing planning and metropolitan governance, support it by action research, and disseminate findings and know-how.

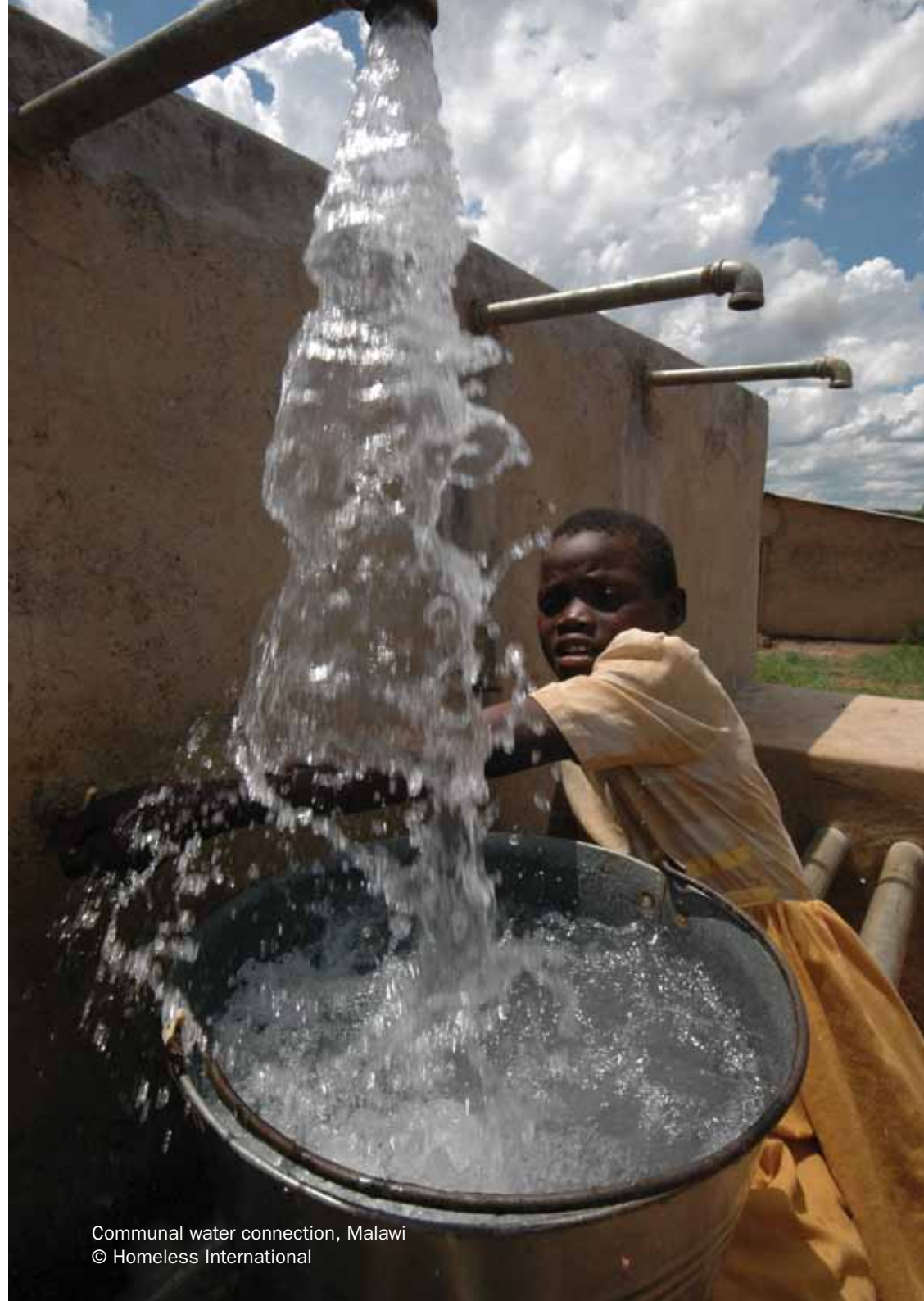
In summary, the Commonwealth could develop: a State of the Commonwealth Cities database; the CLGF Network of Inclusive Cities sharing action-research; an advisory service providing tools for policy-makers; and it could mobilise volunteers to assist in implementation.

This would cover research, policy and delivery and feed into every scale from Commonwealth to local. It would not cost much. The Commonwealth would be seen to be taking a 21st century moral and practical lead. It would be a practical demonstration of how to combine action on the 'green agenda' with action on the 'brown agenda', an expression of solidarity by, with and between the peoples of the Commonwealth.

The way forward

Commonwealth civil society will play its part through the Commonwealth institutions and professional associations and civil society organisations. But civil society needs financial support from the Commonwealth governments and other Commonwealth formal institutions to implement these plans. We believe that Commonwealth civil society organisations and professional bodies have the expertise and knowledge to lead on this front: what we need is a strong commitment and long-term partnership from the local and national governments in the Commonwealth. For example, we know how to map decision processes for disaster mitigation, adaptation, response and recovery but the need is to embed that knowledge at every level; trainers need to be trained, and programmes need to be given profile and quality assurance. We have the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements. Could that body take ownership and provide political leadership for a Commonwealth partnership initiative aimed at enabling the Commonwealth's cities to cope better with urbanisation, economic recovery, climate change and social inclusion?

Could this process be started in 2010 and made operational by 2011 and the next CPF? If there were a modest commitment of funds, the answer is 'yes it could'. That would be a visible and practical demonstration that 'partnering for a more equitable and sustainable future' can really work.



The views of the contributors to this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Commonwealth Foundation or Commonwealth Secretariat or other ComHabitat partners.

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