



Commission for Africa: Comments and ideas from the Commonwealth Association of Planners

The Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP) represents the professional planning institutes in the Commonwealth. We have members in over 25 Commonwealth countries. These include the professional planning institutes of Nigeria, Namibia, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

CAP welcomes the establishment of the Commission for Africa and the intentions to take new ideas for African development to the G8 meeting in 2005. We are pleased to be able to contribute to the process of working for solutions to Africa's problems.

CAP's basic stance on development issues is that we are one world and that there can be no sustainable development without sustainable urbanisation and no sustainable urbanisation without effective spatial planning backed by appropriate local implementation, which will include transparent and efficient regulation of development. The problems of rapid urbanisation, growth of slums, and the urbanisation of poverty have been extensively catalogued by UN Habitat. We would also draw attention to the need to conserve natural environments in any strategy for African development. Strategic planning of infrastructure (at regional, national and even trans-national scales) can help to drive development and lift people out of poverty. Effective planning of urban and regional development could make a contribution to moving countries towards the Millennium Development Goals. In particular such planning can ensure an adequate supply of land for development, provide a measure of certainty to investors, and work with the poor to improve living conditions and local environments. Good planning is part of the process of good governance.

We believe that the following steps could be taken that could make a real impact on Africa development over a generation:

- There should be a **spatial development strategy for Africa**. This would be a trans-national document, under the aegis of the African Union and NEPAD. It would look at Africa as a whole and identify the basic ecological structure of the continent, the environmental assets of global and continental significance, the patterns of migration and economic development, and the transport and energy infrastructure. The aim would be to identify risks, opportunities and gaps in networks in a manner that transcends national boundaries. The strategy should provide a common platform for the AU and the nation states and the international development community and the private sector to identify and target development

(and conservation) priorities. It would not be a static blueprint plan, rather a shared attempt to understand the continent as whole, its economic and environmental resources and to focus actions at all levels.

- The spatial development strategy would identify key **development corridors**. These would be the main communication linkages within and between countries, and linking Africa to the world. These, and the nodes upon them, are of fundamental importance for African development. Some examples already exist, e.g. the Mtwara Transport Corridor, one of a number of Spatial Development Initiatives supported by the Southern African Development Community. However, it is important to see such corridors not just as transport links but as drivers of regional development, where all aspects of infrastructure will be upgraded, new rural/urban links will be forged and new investment will be targeted. Effectively planned and managed corridors can also help to overcome the false dualism of rural versus urban development, by increasing access of rural areas to urban markets and opportunities.
- At the urban scale, it is important to recognise that we are dealing with a dynamic situation, not a static one. The speed of change in Africa demands a strong planning system, based on up-to-date plans informed by market signals. This is particularly important in respect of the problems of slums and informal settlements. All the trends suggest that if we only concentrate on the existing slums, then the problem will actually grow rather than diminish. The key to the slum problem is to stop new slums forming. That requires **positive strategic plans** that identify and bring forward sufficient quantities of land for development in safe and accessible locations. Few African cities have such plans. Two decades and more of under-investment in plan-making, and the legacy of a failed era of architectural masterplans that did not understand market processes have left cities, their residents and their surrounding environments badly equipped to cope with today's extraordinary levels of urbanisation. Yet the cities are crucial to African development, and should benefit from the most informed and sophisticated management (and effective political leadership). There are plenty of examples in the Commonwealth of effective plan-led modernisation and growth, e.g. in Singapore and Malaysia. While any international transfer of ideas has to be handled cautiously, with proper regard to differences in governance, cultures, histories etc. there is a strong case that positive planning should at least be tried in Africa.
- At the local level **participatory and inclusive and integrated planning** is needed. It is very important that governments work with the urban poor and marginalised groups such as women. There needs to be understanding of small business, and an enabling rather than a restrictive development environment. This can only be achieved if the strategic level is right, as described above. There should be a conscious attempt to integrate the actions of the public sector at a local level and to ensure that it understands and can work with the private sector. Obviously this is easier said than done, but again there is Commonwealth African experience, notably in the Integrated Development Plans in South Africa that can be drawn upon. These Integrated Development Plans were built on the traditions, legislation and methods of town and regional planning, and the legacy of such

planning institutions in other countries, provides a possible basis on which to build this more integrated form of planning.

In making these suggestions CAP is only too aware of the extent to which the professional resource base is stretched (and unevenly distributed) across Africa. The tragic impacts of AIDS/HIV compound the problem. Capacity building at all levels has to be part of the development strategy. Good governance makes a difference and good planning is a key part of good governance. The market by itself will not lift Africa out of its current difficulties, and cannot be relied upon to manage non-renewable resources in a wise manner. However, the market is part of the solution. Effective public sector action also has an important part to play.

CAP urges the Commission to come out very clearly for the part that spatial planning from continental to local scale can contribute to African development, and then to find the resources through international development to build the technical capacity needed to deliver pro-poor planning across the continent.

CAP would wish to see (and would be willing to contribute ideas and contacts for) training programmes to build the professional capacity (both quantitative and qualitative) needed for the sustainable development of Africa.