

AN ESSAY ON HOW YOUNG PLANNERS IN THE COMMONWEALTH CAN CONTRIBUTE TO MAKING CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE.

1.0 Introduction:

This paper presents a proposed approach on how young planners can contribute to making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. It is aimed at solving urbanization challenges of inequality and promote urban equity for all city dwellers.

2.0 Background:

The world is rapidly urbanizing with quick transformation of rural and suburban areas into urban areas. This transformation is not without challenges particularly issues of sustainability of the city's development. It has been projected that by year 2050, 70% of the world's population will live in cities, hence the future of the world is very much bound to the performance and characteristic of the urban areas. The former Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon has been unequivocal in relating future urban development with that of global sustainable development. He posited that our struggle for global sustainability will be won or lost in cities, and human future is largely an urban future.

2.1 The population of the world urban areas is set to keep rising due mainly to natural increases and migration. Whereas, many urban dwellers, especially the poor, live in slums and dire conditions in derelict buildings, in filthy environment, without potable water, with poor infrastructure, and bedeviled by diseases and crime. It therefore becomes inevitable for the sake of humanity that efforts are made to cater for everyone who lives in the city- since cities are the future of humanity. Urban centers represent the most effective vehicle for positive advancements in the human condition and environmental change.

2.2 In ensuring due consideration for all city dwellers, there is the concept of making cities safe and sustainable. This means ensuring access to safe and affordable housing and upgrading of slum settlements; It also involves investment in public transport, creating green public spaces, and improving urban planning and management in a way that is both participatory and inclusive.

3.0 Making Cities Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and included an urban specific goal (Goal 11) – “make cities and human settlements more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. The 2030 agenda through Goal 11 reflects the significance of cities

to future global sustainable developments and efforts. Therefore, there is the need for an effective action at all levels to ensure that the aspirations of the 2030 agenda for cities are not undermined.

3.1 Different stakeholders have been identified as critical to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda which include the business community/ private sector, government at all levels, international organisations, financial institutions, and professionals including the Young Planners amongst others. A young planner is defined as someone (of any age) who is in the first 10 years of his career as a planner. The Young Planners are key players in achieving inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities. However to be efficient in their contribution, they need to be empowered through solid knowledge base, capacity-building programmes, specific tools and supporting policy reforms.

The young planners in the commonwealth can contribute to making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable through the following ways:

i. A random sample taken in my neighbourhood and place of work, shows little or very low level of knowledge about Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, and specifically Goal 11. Very revealing was my discovery that, even the educated that one expected would know did not. There is thus a great need for awareness on the idea and importance of making cities safe and sustainable for all. Young Planners can lead negotiations with local communities, advocate for pledges and commitments, which can considerably be built upon for momentum to create inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities. One of the major tasks for young planners is to create awareness of Sustainable Development Goals generally and Goal 11 particularly. This can be done through advocacy campaigns to create environmental awareness and to support citizen's activities. It is imperative that innovative approaches and mechanisms especially the non-formal tools are adopted to raise awareness. In creating this awareness, it is important to change behaviour about the current urban system characterized by anomie, to a more inclusive, caring and safer cities for all inhabitants regardless of differences, and where no one is left behind. And in the words of Governor Akinwunmi Ambode of Lagos State Nigeria, "A city that works for all." Young planners can actively engage and sensitize groups, traditional institutions, community organisations about SDGs and Goal 11.

ii. One of the major challenges of cities in contemporary times is safety and security. Prevention is said to be better and indeed cheaper than cure. Young planners can make cities safe by promoting the adoption and strategic deployment of technology such as surveillance cameras in urban development plan reports. The awareness that every part of the city is monitored discourages the tendency to commit crime, but and where whenever it occurs, it is easily traced/ tracked, and perpetrators apprehended.

iii. Data is a valuable tool for proper planning. Young planners with the requisite professional training can engage and invest in data generation and capturing, about all city dwellers which can be presented to government/ local authorities as input into policies and programmes to provide adequate and better services to everyone who lives in the city. It is a notorious fact that inadequate and unreliable data are a bane of proper planning and development particularly in developing countries including some in the commonwealth. The effect of this is manifest in inadequate provision of infrastructure, unremitting pressure on existing ones due to congestion, and eventual infrastructure decay. Achieving the goal of an inclusive city will depend on the abilities and capabilities of authorities particularly at the local council or borough level to cater to the basic needs of all city dwellers including the low-income group, migrants, refugees, the youth and elderly aging , women, LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender), and people with disabilities.

iv. Sustainability of any resource is largely dependent on its renewability. To make cities sustainable especially in line with Goal 11 of the SDGs, major resources consumed in the city must be renewable. Young planners can contribute to making cities sustainable by leading advocacy for use of renewable resources and adoption of sustainable living practices. Examples include use of renewable energy such as solar powered electricity, and reuse and recycling of materials. This prevents waste and makes materials available to more people in the city. Adoption of recycling reduces waste or refuse thereby making cities healthier and safer.

v. Inclusiveness refers to the quality of including all sections of society in virtually everything. It is about social equality and equity in the distribution and enjoyment of the common good. For example, it means affordability and non-discrimination in housing so that neighborhoods are diverse and representative of a city's population; it means acceptance of new migrants and respecting and celebrating their culture and religious traditions. As well as protecting the rights of the physically challenged people, LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender) community and promoting religious tolerance. Young Planners can contribute to making our cities inclusive by reinvigorating local community commitment to sustainable urbanization through inclusiveness, participation and equity. With urbanization, inequality and exclusion within cities have been on the rise with many people living in slums with inadequate services. It is important that cities provide opportunities and better living conditions for all. The young planners can put their communities on the global map through mobilizing for collaborative efforts among government, corporate bodies, and international organisations to provide affordable housing, water and sanitation. They can participate in and champion the course that will guarantee equal rights and participation of all including the most marginalized. The young planners should promote urban designs that create jobs and give urban residents the opportunity to enjoy

the benefit of economic development by locating work place close to place of residence and easy mobility/ transportation. All these are critical component of overall urban inclusion.