

KENYA'S EFFORTS FOR EQUITABLE URBAN, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Throughout modern history, urbanization has been a major driver of development and poverty reduction.

The 21st century has reinforced this argument. It has been referred to as the first urban century with over 50 per cent of the world's population living in urban areas. They drive economic growth and offer economies of scale in productivity and public investments. They are also social melting pots, centers of innovation, and drivers of social change.

Kenya has been urbanizing at one of the highest rates in Africa. The 2019 put our urban population at 14,831,700, representing 31.8 per cent of our overall population, which is up by nearly 10 points higher than 10 years prior. With urbanization in the devolved context, we have seen tremendous growth within our counties and urban centers.

However, rapid urbanization provides an opportunity and a challenge. Left unchecked, urban areas and cities can experience inequality, poverty, conflict, violence, and environmental degradation. We recently felt the impact of climate change in our urban spaces, the Covid-19 pandemic, and other phenomena that have challenged our urban resilience responses.

We are reminded of linkages between development of our urban spaces and overall wellbeing of citizens. Indeed, we can no longer ignore increased risks, vulnerabilities, and widespread adverse effects on people living in unplanned communities.

We can now re-imagine our approaches to urban planning, design, and development. How we can embrace sustainability measures, urban resilience, climate change adaptation, and finally how technology can allow us to improve the quality of life for urban dwellers.

Kenya has chosen to respond to this key development opportunity by promoting a new model of urban development that is able to integrate all facets of sustainable development to promote equity, welfare, and shared prosperity.

We have a progressive policy framework that aims to position urban development as the key driver of national and subnational economic development while improving the living conditions and wellbeing of the urban dwellers.

The framework has been improved continuously to address emerging challenges in climate change adaptation, improving urban resilience, and strengthening the governance capabilities of cities, municipalities, and towns.

Consequently, it is my hope that we will embrace equitable urban and regional development efforts that would relieve population pressure in the urban areas, help to better integrate the country's rural and urban economies, improve quality of life in the primate cities, and increase modernization of the surrounding rural areas.

The government is committed to sustainable urban development and we have implemented various programs under the government's Kenya Urban Programme.

Through KUSP, the Kenya Informal Settlement Improvement Programme and the Nairobi Metropolitan Services Improvement Program implemented by the State Department for Housing and Urban Development, with support of development partners, the national government has been providing support for the development of urban areas, cities, municipalities, and informal settlements.

The programme incorporates emphasis on spatial and urban planning as it influences the nature, character, and economic development of our urban centers.

Indeed, it is through these planning efforts that we aim to achieve the desired order, form and function, and the much-needed efficient cities and urban areas.

Under the Kenya Urban Support Programme, we have disbursed over \$ 24 million to 59 municipalities in 45 counties for the purposes of developing urban infrastructure and undertaking economic stimulus projects.

The programme has so far financed over 263 infrastructure investments that are at various stages of implementation. About 150 investments have been completed in the areas of waste management, connectivity, storm water drainage, social economic infrastructure and fire and disaster management.

The infrastructure investments have mitigated floods, improved safety and security, enhanced county revenues and provided traders and buyers with modern market facilities.

KUSP has supported county governments with capacity building and infrastructure development grants, subject to some minimum conditions. The idea has been to build incentives through the availability of conditional grants, to achieve a sound urban management capability at the county level, through urban boards and committees.

All the 45 counties have set up municipal boards and administrations and 59 municipalities have prepared County Urban Institutional Development Strategies, outlining county's overall approach to management of its urban areas.

The strategies provide the process by which counties integrate urban development into county-wide planning and provide annual action plan and budget for achieving the programme objectives.

It is my hope that our contributions will be the foundation for sustainable, inclusive, and healthy communities, towns, municipalities, cities, and overall urban areas in the Country.

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