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Economic Commission for Africa
Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender
Fourth session
Online, 17 and 18 November 2021
Item 5 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Parallel sessions**Inclusive and resilient growth in Africa: the role of spatial planning****Aide-memoire****I. Context**

1. The fourth session of the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender will be held online on 17 and 18 November 2021 under the theme “Building forward better towards an inclusive and resilient future in the context of COVID-19”.

2. Within the context of the session, the Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) will convene a number of parallel sessions, including a parallel session on “Inclusive and resilient growth in Africa: the role of spatial planning”.

3. During the third session of the Committee, held in 2019, ECA member States requested the Urbanization and Development Section of the Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division to support member States in the alignment of spatial and economic planning in the context of the region’s rapid urban growth. Specifically, the Committee noted that spatial planning was a precondition for inclusive growth and development and that in the absence of adequate spatial planning, many African cities were growing in a haphazard and chaotic manner. ECA was therefore requested to give due consideration to spatial planning in its work, which could help promote well planned and managed urbanization and foster more inclusive growth and development.

4. In response, ECA, through its Urbanization and Development Section, has supported efforts by member States to strengthen spatial and urban planning in the context of their national economic planning policies and processes and in line with the global and regional commitments set out in the New Urban Agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union. The parallel session on the role of spatial planning in supporting inclusive and resilient growth in Africa will provide an opportunity to discuss the work undertaken by the Urbanization and Development Section in this regard.

* E/ECA/CSPPG/4/1.



II. Background

5. The urban growth rate in Africa currently stands at 3.44 per cent per year, higher than in any other global region, and the continent's urban population now accounts for some 13.4 per cent of the global total. It is, moreover, estimated that, within 20 years, more than 22 per cent of the world's urban population will live in African cities. Already some 588 million Africans live in cities, the epicentre of most economic activity, where they contribute more than half of African countries' GDP (from 58 per cent of GDP in Malawi and Ethiopia to as much as 85 per cent in Tunisia).

6. Cities are also where most coronavirus disease (COVID-19) transmissions occur. Indeed, over 90 per cent of COVID-19 cases are in urban areas. African Governments must therefore revisit their urban development plans and determine what actions they can take to make their cities more resilient to future shocks and crises.

7. To that end, spatial planning must be made a key component of economic policy development to promote more productive, inclusive and resilient urbanization. Adopting a coherent urban development approach can enhance understanding of the development process and facilitate strategic decision-making across sectors. Aligning economic and spatial priorities and coordinating household, business and public investments within cities can drive and sustain growth and should lie at the heart of policymaking in Africa.

8. Spatial planning decisions shape the size of cities, the economic activities that take place there and their links with other urban centres and can therefore have a significant impact on national development. Indeed, poorly-designed spatial policies may have unforeseen repercussions for future growth. National spatial planning should therefore be underpinned by a well-thought-out economic rationale and policymakers should consider the spatial implications of priority economic sectors.

9. In drawing up national spatial policies, decision makers should also consider the potential of regional markets in Africa, which present opportunities for economies of scale, knowledge-sharing and trade in goods with higher value added than those typically exported outside the continent. Fostering a national urban system that supports regional integration can leverage the economic potential of cities. In the long run, coordinating spatial and economic planning should help to build a network of diverse and specialized cities with complementary economic functions and strong links to smaller towns and rural areas.

10. In the light of resource constraints, African countries would benefit from channelling investments towards certain priority locations, leveraging the advantages offered by urban areas. This will help African countries establish and reap the benefits stemming from urban agglomeration economies. At the same time, it is critical that they build transport networks linking those priority areas and cities with strategically located secondary cities and growth centres. When implemented within a credible and long-term policy framework, such a strategic approach to infrastructure investment will also attract private sector investment flows, further enhancing development coordination across space and sectors.

11. Against this background, the parallel session will consider a number of critical issues, including:

(a) How spatial and urban planning issues can be effectively addressed in national economic policies;

(b) Lessons learned in the context of efforts by ECA to support spatial and economic planning in Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Lesotho and Uganda;

(c) Opportunities for member States to strengthen spatial and urban planning with a view to fostering inclusive growth;

(d) The assistance that ECA can provide to member States to ensure that urban and spatial issues are appropriately addressed in national development policies.

III. Objectives of the parallel session

12. The overall objective of the parallel session is to provide member States and other stakeholders with an opportunity to discuss and deepen their understanding of the work of ECA in the area of spatial planning, and to provide feedback and input in that regard on the basis of their experiences and concerns. Specifically, the parallel session will:

(a) Gather feedback from member States on recent activities undertaken by ECA to strengthen spatial planning;

(b) Provide an opportunity for participants to discuss the role played by spatial planning in fostering inclusive growth in Africa, in addition to related opportunities and challenges;

(c) Generate guidance and recommendations to inform future work by ECA in support of sustainable urbanization in Africa.

IV. Expected outcomes and outputs

13. A number of outcomes and outputs are expected from the parallel session. These include:

Outcomes

(a) A deeper understanding of the measures that can be taken to strengthen policies and strategies that harness the untapped potential of urbanization for inclusive and resilient growth in Africa;

(b) An enhanced grasp of the role of spatial planning in realizing inclusive growth in Africa;

(c) Strengthened partnerships for enhanced responses to urbanization and development in Africa.

Outputs

14. At the end of the fourth session, the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender will consider and adopt recommendations formulated by experts during the parallel sessions.

V. Format of the parallel session

15. The parallel session will be held as a break-out session during the fourth session of the Committee, as per the provisional agenda of the fourth session. Thematic presentations will be made by the Committee secretariat followed by discussions in which relevant experts will make observations/comments, draw conclusions and make recommendations.

VI. Documentation

16. The parallel session will be informed by several country level reports and tools developed by the Urbanization and Development Section. Weblinks to

relevant publications, technical materials and knowledge products will be shared online with participants during the parallel session.

VII. Participation

17. The Committee comprises experts from ECA member States drawn from ministries responsible for gender, social development, urbanization and economic planning. Representatives from African regional economic communities, the African Union Commission, the United Nations system, civil society organizations and academia will attend as observers.

18. The Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division of ECA serves as convener and secretariat of the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender.

VIII. Language

19. The parallel session will be conducted in English and French, with simultaneous interpretation.
