

4D

## Dialogue #5: Urbanization and demographic dividend(s)

Government-Government  
Policy Dialogues on  
Demographic Diversity  
and Dividends





# INTRODUCTION

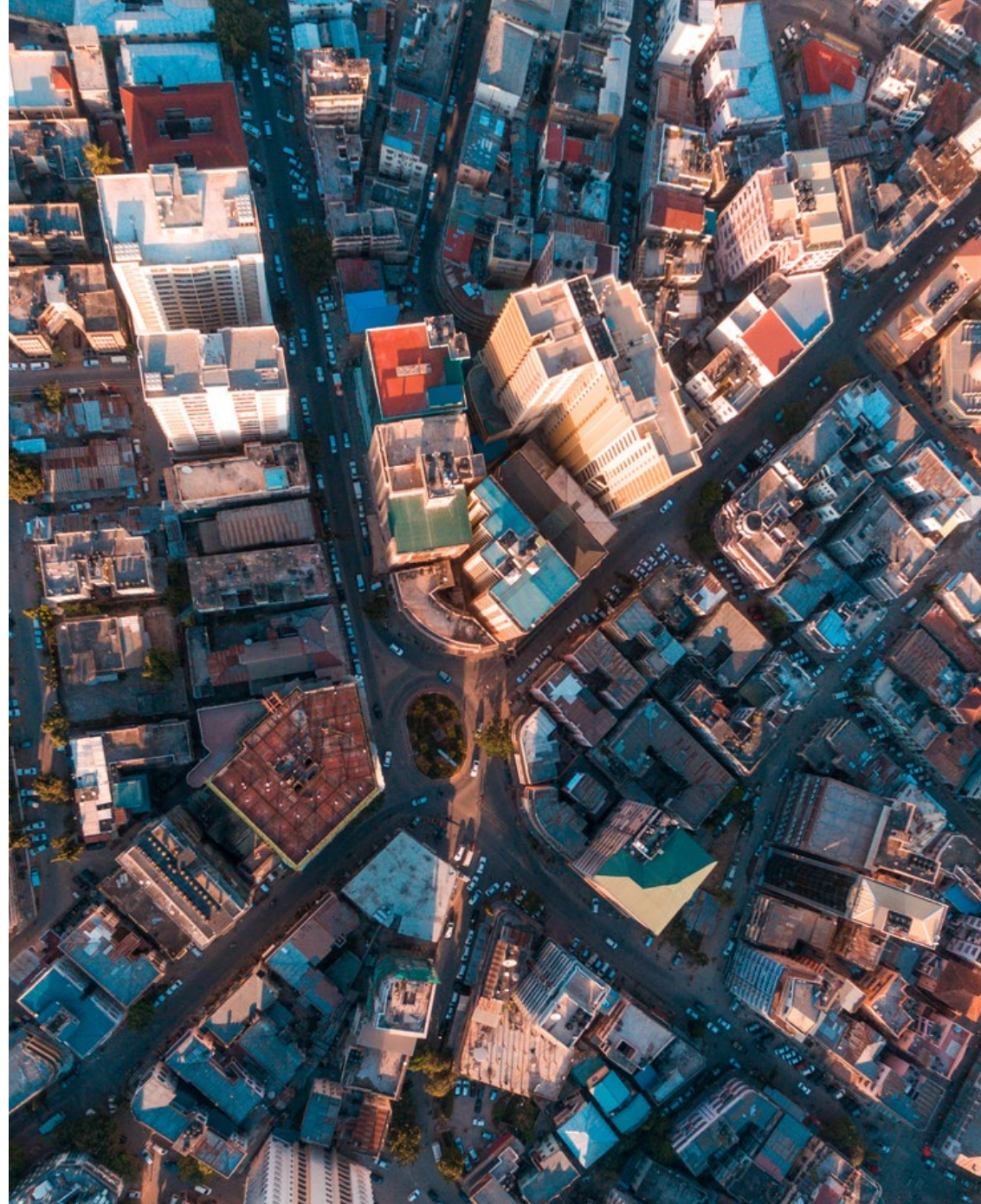
It came as no surprise in 2019 that the [United Nations' Secretary General highlighted in their report](#) urbanization as one of the five mega-trends affecting progress towards sustainable development. More than two thirds of the world population is projected to live in cities in 2050, a more than 10 percent increase from today. On the African continent, 80 percent of the population increase by 2050 will occur in cities. Many cities are young cities, as young people increasingly move to cities for better education and employment opportunities. As engines for innovation and progress, cities constitute an immense potential to social and economic development and for young people and women to contribute to the demographic dividend. Uncontrolled and unsustainable urbanization dynamics can, however, turn this trend to the opposite, resulting in exacerbation of poverty, consolidation of slums and precarious living conditions. To ensure that countries make the most of urbanization trends, they need to work towards creating livable cities for all that are resilient and safe spaces and enable their residents to reach their full potential.

On 17 March 2022, more than 160 participants, experts, and speakers from 60 countries convened virtually in the fifth edition of the Government-Government Policy Dialogue series on Demographic Diversity and Dividend(s). The 4D Series, jointly organized by the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Government of Germany, joined by UN Habitat for this session, builds on discussions launched in 2019 at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 around policies and practices that countries can apply in development planning.

Five breakout sessions focused on key questions linking urbanization and demographic dividends and on successful examples of fostering sustainable urban development:

- Delivering universal access to health and family planning in cities
- Cities and sustainable economic development
- Climate change and urban resilience
- Urban planning
- Connecting urban and rural development

This report provides a brief account of the dialogue, seeks to encourage further engagement with the issues and portrays examples from cities around the world that were shared during the event. An [input paper](#) has been prepared in advance to inform discussions.





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In rapidly urbanizing countries, social and economic development relies on cities. It is therefore imperative that governments focus on sustainable urbanization, as only then will urban dwellers, and especially urban youth, be able to reach their full potential. Sustainable urban development touches upon all areas of daily life and requires policymakers to consider various topics covering universal access to health and family planning in cities; sustainable economic development, climate change and urban resilience; and urban planning and urban-rural development. Only if governments succeed in combining these elements into urban policies, planning and governance structures that ensure the wellbeing of all residents, can they benefit from demographic change and harness demographic dividends.



The following section summarizes key action points suggested by the participants:

- Provide urban health service providers with the necessary training and resources to deliver services, counselling and access to information without bias and discrimination, including for young people, women, migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups.
- Rather than replicating innovative projects on a small scale, programme managers should aim to integrate them into ongoing programmes and consider establishing public-private partnerships as a funding means to take projects to scale.
- Create youth-friendly spaces which offer comprehensive counselling and information, address misconceptions and disinformation on health-related topics.
- Foster regional, integrated and interconnected urban development to harness the potential of secondary cities and rural areas for social and economic development.
- Promote green economies in cities to increase climate resilience and create sustainable employment opportunities at the same time.
- Ensure that business environments and policy regulations promote formal employment opportunities and capacity building for urban youth.
- Realize meaningful and active participation of urban communities – especially indigenous and informal communities – to ensure their knowledge and experiences inform the development of climate resilience strategies.
- Employ the large percentage of young people in cities in the advancement of green technologies, provide them with spaces to develop and incubate solutions, and support them in taking successful ideas and pilots to scale.
- Collect reliable and high-quality data on urban populations in order to design inclusive urban policies.
- Harness the potential of slum-free cities as the reference point of urban planning, acknowledging the importance of adequate living conditions for economic development.





## 1. UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING IN CITIES

Cities can provide ideal conditions for accessible and inclusive health and family planning (FP) services as their density allows for greater proximity of facilities. Well-functioning FP services are crucial especially for women's empowerment and wellbeing and to counter negative outcomes of urbanization. However, this ideal city often remains illusory when urbanization happens rapidly and unplanned. In these cases, the urban environment itself may cause health challenges: inadequate infrastructure, pollution, precarious living conditions in informal settlements and insecure environments for women and girls are among the factors which create unhealthy cities. Additionally, FP programmes in urban contexts need to overcome various other obstacles like supply-side barriers as well as social, economic, and religious factors preventing the use of contraceptives. Monitoring, evaluation and further research on these issues is required to improve programme design in this regard. Such developments prevent urban dwellers from fully enjoying their rights and reaching their full potential, with particularly severe consequences for already vulnerable groups. Universal access to health and family planning constitutes a critical step towards a healthy population fit for education and employment and thus a precondition for harnessing a demographic dividend.

► In **Nigeria**, the Youth Development and Empowerment Initiative (YEDI) is an adolescent health initiative which aims to facilitate access to health services. YEDI focuses on adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH), orphans and vulnerable children and youth, HIV prevention, malaria prevention education, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and neglected tropical diseases prevention awareness. Among other cities, YEDI is active in the capital Lagos, where the initiative has been partnering with the Lagos State Government Ministry of Health and UNFPA since 2015 to provide youth-friendly services at the "Hello Lagos" sites. Their staff, trained for the special needs of adolescents, provides young people with information on general health and SRH. Acknowledging the nexus between health, education and youth empowerment, YEDI also offers consultation and support for personal development and community mobilisation.





Participants of the breakout group **Delivering universal access to health and family planning in cities** underlined how access to health and education rely on each other and together constitute the basis for empowering citizens. They identified several, often intertwined, factors that constitute hindrances to universally accessible health services. Prominent among them is a lack of disaggregated data, especially on vulnerable groups, and their respective requirements. As a result, service providers may not be sensitive to the particular needs of diverse urban populations. Participants also noted that centres are often not safely accessible for vulnerable groups, which undoes one potential advantage that urban settings provide, namely the close proximity of residents to health centres. Furthermore, lack of funding often prevents the adoption and scaling up of good practices in the area of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and family planning. Participants suggested several courses of action. First, service providers need to receive the necessary training to deliver services, counselling and access to information, including for young people, women, migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups. Secondly, cities should avoid replicating innovative projects on a small scale but should aim to integrate them into ongoing programmes. Public-private partnerships should be increasingly considered as a funding means to take projects to scale. Finally, it should be a priority to create youth-friendly spaces which offer comprehensive counselling and information, address misconceptions and disinformation on health-related topics and provide access to information without bias and discrimination.



“ Women and girls’ mobility in cities – even when we talk about cities being dense, and the advantages of cities offering closer proximity to health services – is severely limited in an insecure environment. Overcoming urban planning challenges in terms of safety and security is essential for women’s and girls’ health, which is critical in terms of unlocking the potential demographic dividend.

Ronak Patel – Director, Urbanization and Resilience Program, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative






## 2. SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND URBAN RESILIENCE

If left unaddressed, climate change can exacerbate the most pressing socio-economic challenges in cities. The continuous urbanization accelerates the need to build more climate resilient cities to ensure that the most vulnerable are not left behind in poverty. While many of these challenges originate from the particularities of urban settings, cities also offer great conditions to solve them if decision makers are prepared to make use of them. Intriguingly, in the case of poverty and climate change vulnerability, the solutions are interconnected and, if well planned, can serve one another through green economic growth. If policymakers and practitioners succeed in productively combining actions across sectors, and in including young people into the process, they provide the necessary circumstances for urban youth to thrive, advancing the economic and social development of society as a whole.

▶ **South Africa** has set up a number of urban observatories in the country's biggest cities to improve urban data monitoring, collection and analysis. Bringing local governments and universities together, these observatories aim at using academic expertise and locally generated data to enhance urban planning processes. Observatories collect and analyze reliable data on urban areas to identify key opportunities and challenges, and support decision-makers in using the data for future policy choices. The urban observatories model was developed by UN-Habitat and partners.





“Greening African cities’ economies will require new skills, which unfortunately are not there yet at the moment. There needs to be a lot of emphasis on reskilling our youth, on reskilling the population to grab those opportunities of the future.

Joel Nana – Project Manager, Sustainable Energy Africa

The breakout group **Cities and sustainable economic development** noted a lack of data on urban areas, including on population dynamics and informality. This is preventing economic development approaches that respond to the actual needs and particularities of urban populations. Furthermore, they called for a change of perspective on addressing climate change in cities. Firstly, instead of viewing urbanization as a challenge, large and growing urban populations should be seen as an opportunity to harness the demographic dividend. Secondly, instead of focusing mainly on capital cities, policymakers should take secondary cities into account more, harnessing their equal potential for social and economic development and fostering complementary urban planning for connected cities. With regards to job creation, the discussants agreed that immense potential lies in the green transformation of urban economies and in urban planning for climate resilience. They underlined the importance of business environments and policy regulations that promote formal employment opportunities and capacity building, especially for young people. The process of green transition should be based on reliable data and follow proper strategic planning processes. Partnerships between cities and local universities can help in collecting and analyzing urban data.





Cities are already facing those climate change impacts forecasted to affect the entire planet one day. This makes them vulnerable, but also poses the chance of being catalysts in developing and testing climate resilience strategies. The breakout group **Climate change and urban resilience** centred around the question of how local governments can seize this critical moment to advance urban resilience and inclusive, sustainable economic development at the same time. The group underlined that resilience strategies should not rely on top-down approaches but include the great potential within urban communities into their development. For example, the large informal sectors in many cities have proven very resilient and adaptive to changes in the past; this knowledge should be harnessed and employed by municipal governments. Discussants agreed that the large proportion of young people in many cities of the Global South constitutes a chance to advance strategies for climate resilience, as youth are capable of quickly acquiring new skills required for green technologies and have a great innovative potential. To harness this advantage, local governments need to provide urban youth with spaces to develop and incubate solutions and support them in taking successful ideas and pilots to scale.

► **Forests** play a vital role in maintaining urban water cycles, and cities' actions are key to meeting climate change targets. The initiative Cities4Forests tries to harness those synergies and linkages. It helps cities around the world to connect with and invest in inner forests (such as city trees and urban parks), nearby forests (such as green corridors and watersheds) and faraway forests (such as tropical and boreal forests). Currently, 73 cities have already partnered with the project.



“ The engagement process for young people often comes too late. Experts sit around the table and decide what is to be done and then take this to the community. Training and capacity building before any project is on the table is important, so that when young people participate, they have the tools and capabilities to engage – from conceptualization to implementation.

Meremiya Hussein – Kenyan-based architect and urbanist



### 3. URBAN PLANNING, URBAN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

There is no urban development without rural development and vice versa. Urban and rural areas are both affected by demographic changes, making their productive exchange and collaboration a precondition for economic development and for harnessing the demographic dividend. This requires functioning planning and governance structures, which acknowledge the diversity of populations and ensure that nobody is left behind.

Discussions of the breakout group **Urban planning** analyzed how population dynamics can productively inform urban planning and urban governance. The group pointed out that reliable data on city dwellers, including on vulnerable groups such as internally displaced people (IDPs) and people living in informal settlements is key to designing inclusive urban policies. Importantly, this allows to benefit from cities' collective knowledge, yielding innovative solutions that are tailored to specific needs of communities. Participants emphasized the advantages of urban profiling, a process that combines and layers data from different sources in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the urban fabric, of potentials to be explored and of interventions to be made. The group agreed that informal settlements require special attention: if urban growth is not regulated by proper urban planning mechanisms, informal settlements will increase and consolidate, as will their precarious living conditions. Preventing residents from flourishing economically and socially, this will also prevent the realization of demographic dividends.

**“ We do not only need demographic information in terms of age, sex etc., but also data on the socio-economic circumstances of the different groups within urban centers. Only thus can we plan effectively and work towards transforming their circumstances and enabling them to participate.**

David G Ndegwa – US-based independent consultant on migration, population, health, development, and humanitarian assistance

UN-Habitat's tool CityRAP addresses small to intermediate-sized cities in sub-Saharan African countries. It takes municipal authorities, local stakeholders and community members through a four-step process that eventually results in a city resilience framework for action. The tool has been, among other places, applied in **Somalia's** secondary cities, which are growing rapidly. In order to better understand growing and changing demand for basic services and ensure that no one is left behind in urban planning, urban profiles were developed for the cities. The profiling process involves the community in data capturing and processing from the start, for example by using mobile phones for data collection and mapping of basic infrastructure. Through a community-based planning process involving focus group discussions, the most urgent needs are prioritized.





Decentral planning and governance structures are often theorized from an urban perspective. This fails to take into account the larger picture, as participants of the breakout group **Connecting urban and rural development** noted. They argued that a change of perspective is much needed: instead of taking the presumed dichotomy of “urban” and “rural” as granted, they should be perceived as parts of interconnected, urban-rural systems. This interconnectedness becomes especially evident when looking at natural resources, water supply management and food production chains. None of these are refined to either urban or rural areas but take up and require the collaboration of both spheres. Participants agreed that decision makers need to acknowledge this by taking a more regional approach to planning and policymaking. Such an approach has to combine regional development with economic development and could re-establish the connection between urban and economic growth – a connection which, as discussants pointed out, is currently broken in many cities of the Global South. Participants called for the creation of industries that support rural and urban economies alike along the entire value chain and that create jobs for growing young populations. Additionally, the group indicated that policymakers need to pay increased attention to peri-urban areas and urban peripheries, where many especially vulnerable people live. Currently, these are often not considered in financial and social protection plans, which still cater to either urban or rural residents and thus fail to account for the in-between.

► In **Senegal**, the Departmental Council of Saint Louis initiated a project that combines ecosystem restoration, urban climate action and economic development. The inter-municipal collaboration to [safeguard the Mangrove in Senegal aims](#) to restore the region's mangrove forests, which have been pushed near extinction due to climate change and expansion of farming activities. Mangroves have the ability to sequester immense amounts of carbon, making them important to climate action. The collaboration initiated various economic activities around the restoration of mangroves, thus showcasing the potential for integrating economic and regional development and climate action.

“ We cannot be so binary about the distinctions between rural and urban. We have some of the fastest development today occurring in peri-urban zones, which do not typically fall in either of these binaries.

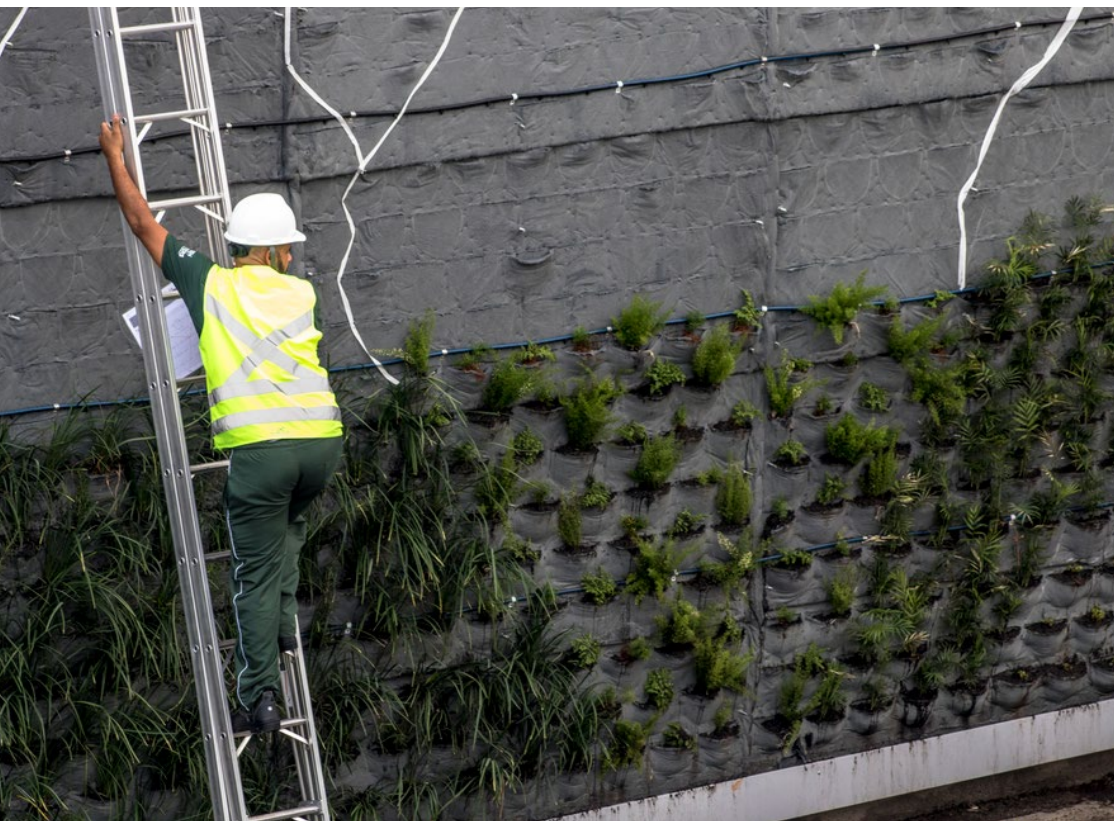
Anjali Mahendra – Director of Global Research, World Resources Institute, Ross Center for Sustainable Cities





## CONCLUSION

Urban populations are on the rise globally, and investing in the creation of liveable, inclusive cities is a necessary condition for countries to harness demographic dividends. Ensuring universal access to health services, advancing the green transformation of urban economies and including vulnerable populations into the development of urban policies are some of the measures regional and national governments have at their disposal. They are powerful tools to enable the health and well-being of urban dwellers, and thus a precondition for social and economic development – of individuals as much as for societies as a whole.



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