Africa -Urbanisation & Slums
SMA Justice Briefing No 14

Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. **Psalm 127**

OCEANS OF POVERTY - ISLANDS OF WEALTH

Urbanisation should bring better living standards, improved housing, education and employment. This is not happening in many African cities where urbanisation has, for the most part, taken the form of unplanned slum growth. This is the stark reality portrayed in the UN Report "*The State of the World's Cities 2010/2011.*" It highlights the grinding poverty, environmental degradation and social inequality that are a part of everyday life for millions of people living in Africa's Cities.

Slum dwellers suffer from multiple and inter-related disadvantages. These include a shortage of schools, water, sanitation, substandard dwellings and unemployment. In turn these conditions contribute to hunger, ill health, a lack of education and of opportunities for advancement. Collectively these factors lead to social isolation and people being trapped in a cycle of poverty that only the luckiest or most resourceful can break out of.

Another pronounced feature of urbanisation in Africa is the divide between rich and poor. In Nairobi 60% of the population live on 5% of the land. The UN Report cited above speaks of African cities as being: *"Oceans of poverty containing islands of wealth."* and says that conditions in African cities are now the most unequal in the world. The report goes on to warn that*:* "*The expected tripling of urban populations by 2050 could spell disaster, unless urgent action is initiated today. This situation threatens stability and also entire nations."*

Achieving just and equitable solutions to the difficulties posed by urbanisation in Africa is an urgent task and a justice issue that is essential for the lives of millions of people. Working for these solutions is a challenge to the Church, and to all who uphold the dignity of the human person.

PREPARING FOR 2050

The task of preparing for the tripling of Africa's urban population cannot be postponed until the 2040's. Studies conducted by the UN and other agencies have made very clear that any chance of managing urban growth in Africa successfully will, to a large extent, depend upon breaking down the current urban divide between rich and poor by removing barriers that prevent participation and social inclusion.

African governments should now be developing needed infrastructure and social services, especially in the areas of health, education and housing. Measures to stimulate economic growth and employment are also of primary importance. Unless this happens the urban divide will continue and sustainable development will be impossible.

Oshodi, Lagos

GROWING SLUMS

At present over four hundred million Africans live in cities - 288 million of these live in areas classed as slums.

Sub-Saharan Africa has the fastest rate of urbanisation in the world and the highest rate of slum dwellers. United Nations research indicates that by 2050 Africa's overall population will double to two billion people. However, in the same period, its urban population will triple to a staggering 1.2 billion and well over half of the continent's total population will live in cities.

A Slum is an urban area with a lack of basic services (sanitation, water, electricity), substandard housing, overcrowding, unhealthy and hazardous locations, insecure tenure and social exclusion.
UNITED NATIONS DEFINITION

Lagos, with a population of 12.4 million,will overtake Cairo as Africa's largest city by 2015.
By 2020 the populations of all Sub-Saharan cities currently above one million people will on average increase by 32%.

These are practical issues and they are local issues. As such the major drivers in urban development will have to be local and national governments.

Effective leadership within governments is crucial to facilitate and guide needed change between now and 2050.

Developing leadership for good governance and civil society must therefore be a priority over the next few decades within African nations. The international community can support this process through investment to build capacity for governance, service delivery and urban planning.

A slum in Accra

OUTSTANDING ISSUES

Dealing with issues that are already having a negative impact on Africa's self-sustainability and resources must also be part of preparing for urban growth. The UN has already urged African governments to think again when it comes to making decisions on land lease deals as feeding growing urban populations will be a great challenge. Where governments do decide to grant such leases the long term benefits to their populations should be clear and worthwhile. It has also been suggested that National governments consider decentralising government departments in order to spread urbanisation rather than concentrate it in national capitals such as Nairobi and Lagos.

Dealing with Africa's indebtedness, through debt relief and through the cancellation of illegitimate debt, would also allow funds now consumed in debt servicing to be diverted to urban infrastructure projects. Another major financial drain on the developing world is the estimated $160 BILLION annual loss of revenue through corporate tax evasion. If Africa's share of this loss was available to national Governments it would go a long way in providing the services needed to support urban expansion.

A re-alignment of how international Aid is used over the next few decades could also assist in preparing for 2050. More emphasis should be placed on projects and development that will either relieve or support the growth of Africa's Cities.

While the activities of multinationals in Africa are often seen as negative (due to tax-evasion, environmental degradation and land grabs), they could play a very positive role in economic growth and employment generation were they to adopt a more transparent and socially responsible corporate approach.

Abijan's modern skyline

THE CHURCH, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POVERTY

Tin-Pan Roofs
Ibadan

The writing is on the wall. It is clear that addressing the issue of Slums and Urbanisation in Africa will require local, national and international cooperation. In solidarity with the poor the Church too must play its part.

While caring for people's spiritual needs the principles of Church Social Teaching must also be implemented as a witness to the Gospel. The Church's role is to encourage, support and cooperate with development that promotes human dignity and to challenge all that perpetuates, inequality and injustice.

In line with the Church's mission to promote authentic human values the 2009 Synod of African Bishops, focused on the principle of the common good as a means of promoting justice and the welfare of peoples.
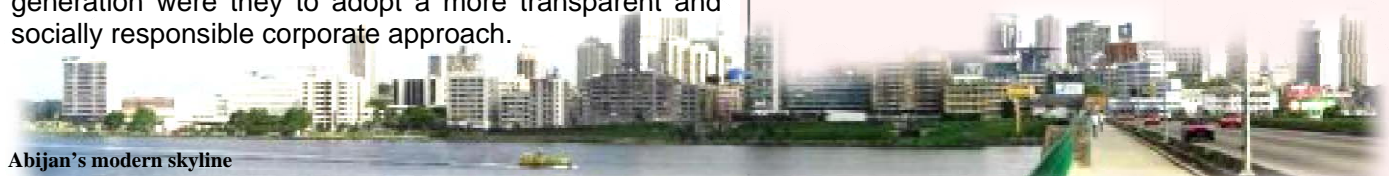
Looking to civil authorities the Synod appealed to governments to offer security in society and to ensure the basic needs of life to the most vulnerable though a just distribution of the fruits of development. Proposition 15. The current unjust economic order order that has led to the perpetuation of poverty was strongly denounced. Instead the Bishops called for an economy that serves the needs of the poor. Civil leaders were called on to address issues such as access to land, water, infrastructure and education. Proposition 17

Looking at the Church's own response to poverty the Bishops proposed that:

•The Church-Family of God in Africa recommit to the service of the poor, orphans and marginalised in imitation of the early-Church.
•As in the case of the early Church, the Church in Africa must develop an internal system for taking care of their needs there is an urgent need to establish a solidarity fund on the continental level.
•The Church should endeavour to promote and inculcate a holistic perception of work as an expression of grace and solidarity. In this way, human talent will be acknowledged and employed as needed for the good of all.
•The poor and marginalised be empowered through initiatives such as micro-finance, agrarian and similar programmes as the Church's concrete sign of solidarity with the poor and marginalised;
•Awareness of the Church's Social Teaching be promoted on all levels of the Church in Africa.