20+ Reasons Why National Urban Policy Matters
REASONS WHY NATIONAL URBAN POLICY MATTERS
Definition

“A coherent set of decisions derived through a deliberate government-led process of coordinating and rallying various actors for a common vision and goal that will promote more transformative, productive, inclusive and resilient urban development for the long term” UN-Habitat (2014). National urban policy framework for a rapid diagnostic. Nairobi

Five development phases

Feasibility Phase: This phase is essential for determining the viability of NUP while providing the framework and direction for its development and implementation. It is crucial for making sound decisions and setting directions.

Diagnosis Phase: This phase provides a detailed understanding of the local context, policy problems and opportunities, clarifies the policy goals and maps out key stakeholders. On the right is a guide through the diagnosis phase.

Formulation Phase: This phase allows for mapping of what will occur between the definition of the policy problem(s) and the attainment of the policy goal. It is a phase in which policy options and goals are evaluated.
**Implementation Phase:** During this phase, the policy proposal and plan completed during the formulation phase will be translated into actionable items. This phase also ensures that all stakeholders have the capacity (human, financial and institutional) to implement the policy as planned.

**Monitoring and Evaluation Phase:** This should not be regarded as the “last” phase in the NUP process. Monitoring should be undertaken throughout the implementation of the policy. The evaluation is an opportunity to review the gains made and evaluate any shortcomings. Lessons learned from an evaluation of outcomes and process can feedback into the policy cycle and promote an iterative policy design.

20+ REASONS

1. Whole encompassing development tool
2. Pro-people process
3. Rule of the game
4. Common vision for urbanisation
5. Long term returns
6. Actions-oriented political statements
7. Balanced development
8. Robust & continuous processes
9. Cross-sectional tool
10. Pro-active policy
11. Uniform urbanisation direction
12. Support cities
13. Commitment to sustainable urban agenda
14. Overarching coordinating framework
15. National socio-economic benefits
16. Effective management framework
17. Inclusive urban development
18. Precautionary Framework
19. Interactions between human settlements
20. Cooperation & connectivity
21. Integrated territorial development
Whole-encompassing development tool

National Urban Policy (NUP) is an integrated development tool that helps address key planning questions such as: population trends, urban trends and the benefits of urbanisation for the nation as a whole.
NUP should be understood as a pro-people process that contributes to increasing opportunities for all, equitability and freedom of choice (especially in terms of location) and leaving no one or no place behind.
NUP is used by the central government to establish the “rules of the game” with local authorities and other actors by defining urban values and providing guidance for a transformative society while using cities as engine of growth.
NUP creates a common vision for urbanisation in a country, while also transforming the mindset of all stakeholders. In doing so, NUP provides the framework for advancing sustainable urbanisation as a driver of development and peace to improve living conditions for all.
Long-term returns

As urbanisation is inevitable for developed, developing, emerging and transitioning countries, NUP triggers harmonisation of the urbanisation process, therefore turning investment in urban policy process into huge and long-term returns.
NUP is a comprehensible, yet contains actions-oriented political statements towards urban development. For the implementation of such a policy, national strategies, national budgets and pro-active central governments, empowered local authorities and a well-resourced administration are necessary. This is an important argument for national driving forces to engage in administrative reforms to foster urban development and reap the benefits of urbanisation to invest into national development.
A NUP fosters collaboration and addresses the question of equitable development by sharing responsibilities and urbanisation dividends between national and subnational governments. The national level is requested to support urban development respecting governance criteria such as ownership (at the local level) and balanced growth (supporting all urban settlements and not giving preference to e.g. the economic hubs, job creation, value sharing). Though, there is no legal obligation for having an urban policy in place, NUP can be the basis for national legislation related to smaller and emerging towns, cities and metropolitan areas. In a number of countries, NUPs have achieved the status of a national law.
Developing and implementing NUP requires passing through a robust and continuous processes and interwoven steps such as the analysis of the populations dynamics, undertaking the state and the system and hierarchy of cities, legal frameworks and their practices, economic analysis, planning culture and practices, etc.

The urban policy process may consider stages such as feasibility, diagnostic, formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. These stages should be supported by extensive capacity development, stakeholder participation and ownership, and strong evidence through demonstration interventions.
NUP also tackles issues that are “left out” from mainstream national and sub-national governments discourse. NUP is a cross-sectoral tool. Efforts shall be made to mainstream issues that affect cities and human settlements to NUP. UN-Habitat had developed such tools including mainstreaming climate change, slum upgrading, urban-rural linkages, food security and nutrition, public space and gender.
The NUP is a pro-active policy that does not only regulate and set standards, but also has the potential to shape sustainable and desired patterns of urbanisation for the future generations. NUP shall be able to anticipate forthcoming challenges while preparing the conditions for reaping the potential benefits and opportunities.
Ultimately, NUP can provide economic stability and sustained growth. The NUP is the framework that steers a nation or sub-national entity towards a uniform urbanisation direction: the ecological footprint of urban development can best be tackled by policies that help the management and governance of urbanisation, and social empowerment while paying particular attention to critical urban development factors such as environmental, economical and governance issues.
Cities are too important to be left to their own demise, especially where sub-national governments are weak, fragmented and poorly resourced. Current and future cities need the support of national governments, just as they have a great deal to contribute to national economic vitality, social dynamism, peace and security, and sustainable ecosystems.
Commitment to urban agendas

An inclusive NUP, by national governments, is the (single) most important indication of a strong political commitment to an urban and human settlements agendas to promote more transformative, productive, inclusive and resilient urban development. This directly supports the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals.
Overarching coordinating framework

NUP provides an overarching coordinating framework to address urban challenges, for spatial and institutional integration to maximise the benefits of urbanisation, while mitigating inequalities and potential adverse externalities. NUP bring actors and sectors together for a common purpose.
The complex challenges faced by cities cannot be solved by spatially blind sectoral policies. Governments need to become more sensitive to the threats and opportunities posed by rapid urban growth. A political process is required to mobilise and sustain active support from across the conventional line functions of government. This requires stakeholders and a political champion for an urban agenda for national socio-economic benefits that will stem from better urbanisation, rather than meeting basic needs, repairing the damage caused by the growth of slums, or preventing them emerging in future.
Effective management of urbanisation requires a sustained technical process of building the legal foundations, institutional capabilities, administrative procedures and financial instruments to pursue this agenda effectively. It requires complex arrangements to coordinate the various actors and agencies involved, including different kinds of partnership. A NUP is better placed to provide such an effective management framework.
One of the core objectives of NUP is to manage the peripheral expansion of cities in the interests of encouraging higher density and more integrated urban development. This is bound to require strategic planning and coordination across administrative boundaries in situations where municipalities compete against each other for investment or for example taxpayers. Left to themselves, private developers and public-sector housing providers will tend to favor building on lower cost peripheral land. This may contain the cost of housing in the short-term, but at the expense of ongoing transport costs for households and capital infrastructure costs for government. Sprawl can also damage natural ecosystems, consume precious agricultural land and destroy scarce biodiversity. Furthermore, unregulated property development can result in excessive speculative building and property bubbles that go well beyond the level of demand in the real economy and cause subsequent damage to asset values and confidence.
Precautionary framework

It is more cost-effective and less socially disruptive to plan ahead for urbanisation. Understanding urban growth pressures and taking early action to prevent dysfunctional physical forms emerging is generally better than treating them once they exist. NUP provides countries with the required framework to do so effectively and efficiently.
Urban policy requires a broader territorial perspective on metropolitan regions, including stronger connectivity between cities, towns and rural areas, to promote their distinctive strengths and to encourage mutually beneficial interactions between them in the interests of national prosperity and inclusive growth. Good urban policy provides the conditions to reduce poverty and spatial inequalities for all therefore leaving no one and no place behind.
NUP can involve programmes to strengthen the connectivity and cooperation between cities and their hinterlands. The openness of urban economies and their interdependence with surrounding areas requires efficient linkages with other places. This improves the functional efficiency of metropolitan regions and assists firms and households in rural areas to access the markets in urban areas. Greater cooperation and connectivity between cities also enables industrial specialisation and the development of distinctive and complementary strengths, which can help to promote national economic competitiveness. Cooperation may extend to strengthening the role of secondary cities in the national urban system so that they function better and help to absorb some of pressures on the largest cities.
NUP is a valuable instrument to reassert the importance of the territorial and spatial dimension in policy-making. Good national policy would steer more integrated development across the territory.
ABOUT UN-HABITAT & RMPU

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-Habitat, is the agency for human settlements. It is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. UN-Habitat works in over 90 countries supporting people in cities and human settlements for a better urban future. The agency has been focusing on urban development for over 40 years. Working with governments and local partners, its high impact projects combine world-class expertise and local knowledge to deliver timely and targeted solutions. The Regional and Metropolitan Planning Unit (RMPU) is one of the three units in the Urban Planning and Design Branch, along with the City Planning, Extension and Design Unit, and the Climate Change Planning Unit.

RMPU plays a key role in supporting the delivery of the following 4 (four) intervention areas:

• National Urban Policies from pre-feasibility, diagnostic, development, implementation to monitoring and tracking progress.

• Regional, Metropolitan and City-region Planning including in development of corridors, clusters and systems of cities and promotion of a green economy, smart city approach and urban-rural linkages.

• The International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning as well as its rolling out, implementation and monitoring.

• Spatial Planning Frameworks at metropolitan, regional, national and supra-national levels.
SELECTED PUBLICATIONS ON NUP

NUP Feasibility Guide

Arab States National Urban Policy Regional Report

The Evolution of National Urban Policy: A Global Review

Urban Policy Regional: Framework for a Rapid Diagnostic

National Urban Policy Database

Urban Policy Regional Reports
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