

## SDG-STYIP Impact Labs Issue Paper for SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

### 1. Introduction

This Issue Paper identifies emerging issues, systemic challenges, and barriers to progress on the achievement of SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities within Africa.

### 2. Landscapes of Issues under SDG 11

#### Persistent housing deficits and inadequate access to basic urban services

- Between 2014 and 2022, the share of Africa’s urban population living in slums declined marginally from 50.4% to 49.1%.<sup>1</sup> However, the absolute number of people living in slums increased,<sup>2</sup> remaining approximately twice the global average of 24.8% in 2022. This contributes to continuous housing challenges and directly impacts poverty reduction, access to healthcare, water, sanitation, and energy.
- The sustained large population in slums indicates a gap between policy adoption and effective housing delivery, often linked to limited public financing for housing, governance and coordination challenges across levels of government, and constraints in urban land management, planning, and infrastructure provision.
- Many residents living in informal or precarious housing are disproportionately exposed to climate-related risks, including flooding, extreme heat, landslides, and storms. Inadequate housing structures, high-density settlements, and limited access to basic infrastructure increase the vulnerability of urban populations to climate shocks, with significant implications for resilience, public health, and sustainable urban development.

#### Weak disaster risk governance and limited institutional coordination

- Disaster-related mortality and displacement remain severe across the continent. A large percentage of the population suffers from natural disasters, for instance, Eswatini recorded the highest number of directly affected persons in the region (more than 22,000 per 100,000 people in 2023).<sup>3</sup>
- Loss from disasters is significant. More than 92,000 critical infrastructure units were damaged annually between 2015–2023, and more than 1.6 million basic services were disrupted each year across Africa.<sup>4</sup> This indicates insufficient integration of risk-sensitive planning and enforcement.
- Floods, droughts, cyclones, and wildfires affect countries across all subregions, from Mozambique and Malawi to Algeria and Uganda, highlighting continent-wide exposure to

<sup>1</sup> UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Programme) (2025). *UN-Habitat Assembly opens with urgent call to action on the global housing crisis*. Available at: <https://unhabitat.org/news/29-may-2025/un-habitat-assembly-opens-with-urgent-global-call-to-action-on-housing>

<sup>2</sup> UN-Habitat. (2023). *2023 HLPF Factsheet: SDG 11 – Sustainable cities and communities*. [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2023/07/2023\\_hlpf\\_factsheet\\_sdg\\_11\\_1.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2023/07/2023_hlpf_factsheet_sdg_11_1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Indicator Number of directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population from UNDESA

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.undrr.org/media/106863/download>

climate shocks.

### **Deteriorating urban air quality and inadequate solid waste management systems**

- Between 2010 and 2019, Africa’s average PM2.5 level increased 2.7% from 32.8 to 33.7  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , while the global average declined by over 10%.<sup>5</sup> Solid waste is projected to reach 269 million tons in 2030.<sup>6</sup> Raising air pollution, together with the lack of solid waste management, undermines health and climate mitigation. The increase in urban air pollution is linked to structural challenges, including rapid urbanization, growing reliance on aging and high-emission vehicle fleets, weak enforcement of industrial emission standards, open waste burning, and limited air-quality monitoring and regulatory capacity.
- Severe statistical and institutional gaps exist in waste management. Only 29 cities across 13 countries on the continent reported data. Among available data, waste collection coverage ranges from near-universal levels in Curepipe, Mauritius (99%) to as low as 1-2% in Kinshasa, DRC, demonstrating uneven implementation.<sup>7</sup>
- Clean technology providers, transport operators, public, formal and informal waste management companies and recycling enterprises, are central to scaling circular economic solutions and emission reductions.

### **Fragmented urban planning, uneven land-use efficiency, and limited access to public spaces constrain the continent’s capacity to accommodate demographic change.**

- Inefficient land use directly affects infrastructure costs, transport emissions, and economic productivity. It also limits the availability of safe, inclusive public spaces, which are vital for social cohesion, public health, and urban livability.
- Urban expansion in many African cities is not keeping pace with population growth, contributing to overcrowding and pressure on urban services. Across 270 African cities, the share of built-up areas allocated to public open space varies widely—from 46.3% in North Africa to 15.3% in Central Africa. Meanwhile, the ratio of land consumption to population growth remains low in several countries, suggesting that housing supply, and infrastructure development lag population growth.
- Urban planning legislation and laws need to be updated and harmonized. Additional land tenure and land governance need to be clarified, as well as guaranteeing legal protection of public spaces. Financing public space creation and their maintenance is central to their sustainability.

### **Limited access to safe and sustainable public transport can hinder urban development.**

- Convenient access to public transport remains below 40% across African subregions,

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<sup>5</sup> Indicator Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (Particulate Matter with a diameter of 2.5 micrometers) from ECA Stat.

<sup>6</sup> Adedara, Muiyiwa & Taiwo, Ridwan & Bork, Hans-Rudolf. (2023). Municipal Solid Waste Collection and Coverage Rates in Sub-Saharan African Countries: A Comprehensive Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. Waste. 1. 389-413. 10.3390/waste1020024.

<sup>7</sup> Indicator Municipal Solid Waste collection coverage, by top and bottom 10 cities from UNDESA

compared to the global average of 51.6%.<sup>8</sup> Performance in smaller cities may be even worse.

- Unequal access to public transport remains stark: some cities report over 90% coverage (Tolga, Banjul), while others report below 2% (Bata, Kikwit, Misratah).<sup>9</sup> In addition to the urgent need for increased investment in this area, priority must also be given to efficient operation, regular maintenance, and equitable accessibility as central pillars of infrastructure development.
- In many cities, gaps remain in areas such as road safety regulation, non-motorized transport (NMT) planning, and emerging electric mobility policies, highlighting the importance of stronger public-sector coordination alongside private and community initiatives.

### **Rapid urban population growth placing increasing pressure on infrastructure, services, and urban governance systems**

- Africa's urban population is projected to double by 2050, with over 60 per cent of the population expected to reside in cities, significantly increasing demand for housing, transport, water, energy, and other urban services.
- Infrastructure expansion and service delivery in many cities are struggling to keep pace with population growth due to financing constraints, limited planning capacity, and coordination challenges.
- Rapid urbanisation is placing increasing pressure on municipal governance systems to manage land use, infrastructure investment, and equitable access to services.
- Digital connectivity, data systems, and emerging technologies offer opportunities to improve urban planning and service delivery, yet their adoption and integration remain uneven across cities.

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<sup>8</sup> UN DESA, based on data from 1,507 cities in 126 countries, 2022

<sup>9</sup> Indicator Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport (%) from UNDESA