

High-level dialogue on Unlocking the Power of Urbanization for Africa's Social Development: Progress, Challenges, and Actions for the future

Solution Session at the Second World Summit for Social Development

5 November, 13:15 - 14:30, Room 3, Qatar National Convention Centre

Concept note

I. Event Overview

The Second World Summit for Social Development offers a unique opportunity for national and local governments, National Statistical Offices, think tanks, and implementing partners to engage in dialogue aimed at addressing the pressing social challenges arising from Africa's urban transition.

As Africa undergoes the fastest urban growth in the world—with half of its population projected to live in cities by 2040—the continent holds significant potential to harness the benefits of agglomeration while minimizing its associated costs. However, the current reality tells a different story. The rapid pace of urban transition has not yielded prosperity, sustainability and inclusiveness. Millions continue to live in informal settlements, lacking access to decent jobs and essential services. Moreover, many individuals remain excluded from full participation in the social and economic life.

The solution session will showcase the proactive efforts of African cities, institutions, and stakeholders, foster evidence-based insights, and inspire immediate and long-term actions to harness sustainable and inclusive urbanization as a driver of prosperity by fostering decent job creation, innovation, and social integration.

The event will also present key findings and recommendations from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa's 2025 Report on the *State of Urbanization in Africa*, prepared within the framework of the Second World Summit for Social Development. The report provides in-depth analysis, regional comparisons, and forward-looking perspectives to inform and enrich the discussion on the critical relationship between rapid urbanization and social development.

As a platform for dialogue and exchange, the solution session will address ongoing challenges, highlight progress, share lessons learned from African cities, and explore practical solutions and actionable steps to advance social development, and promote individual well-being in Africa. This in turn contributes to the harmonious functioning of societies—core principles established at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen and reaffirmed at the Second World Summit for Social Development in 2025.

II. Objectives of the solution session

1. **Showcase Sustainable and Inclusive Urbanization Efforts:** Highlight progress and lessons learned by national and local governments, and development partners.
2. **Knowledge Dissemination:** Present a comprehensive overview of the socioeconomic progress and challenges, drawing on recent evidence from the 2025 Report of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa on the *State of Urbanization in Africa*.

3. **Foster Dialogue:** Facilitate high-level panel discussion among national and local governments, and development partners to exchange strategies, insights, and actions that position urbanization as a catalyst for poverty reduction, employment generation, and social integration.

III. Target Audience

- **Policy Makers: National and Local Governments:** Particularly those countries with rapidly growing cities that have been facing economic and social challenges associated with urban transition.
- **Development Partners:** Interested in supporting local governments by building capacity and strengthening future collaborations.
- **Academics and Experts:** Focused on sustainable and inclusive urban development, economy, and social development.
- **Civil Society and Private Sector Representatives:** Engaged in supporting sustainable urban development.

IV. Key topics for the discussion:

- **Progress and lessons learned in the context of rapid urban transition:** a deep dive into the achievements and insights gained from national and local governments' efforts to address economic and social challenges in rapidly growing cities
- **Challenges and actions to overcome the persistent challenges:** Discuss the main challenges faced in the promotion of sustainable and inclusive urbanization. Highlight the actions taken in those areas—or planned—to overcome these obstacles.
- **Insights and solutions for promoting sustainable and inclusive urbanization:** Present findings and analyses from recent research, offering actionable insights and practical solutions to unlock the full potential of sustainable urbanization.

V. Format and Structure of the solution session:

The event will follow a structured format to ensure an engaging and informative discussion. The program will include:

1. **Opening Remarks:** An overview of the critical linkage between rapid urbanization and social development, highlighting its significance for the continent's future and paving the way for discussion.
2. **Thematic presentations:**
 - a. **Overview from Rapidly Growing Cities:** Present lessons learned, key challenges, and actions taken in rapidly urbanizing cities, highlighting the interconnection between economic and social issues and the urban transition.
 - b. **Insights and findings from research and empirical analysis of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa:** Present key messages and recommendations from the report, particularly related to reducing poverty, creating decent jobs, and fostering inclusive social development.
3. **Panel Discussion:** A panel of national and local governments and development partners will discuss the nexus between urbanization and socioeconomic development, focusing on strategic areas for unlocking the potential of urban transition in Africa, including governance, partnerships, data, finance, capacity building, and community participation. In particular, they will be invited to share their perspectives on four core issues: the major progress they are proud to have accomplished; the main challenges they face; the lessons learned from their experiences; and their suggested actions for overcome the challenges.
4. **Interactive Q&A Session:** An open Q&A where participants can engage with panelists to ask questions about the progress, lessons, learned, strategies and actions being discussed.
5. **Closing Remarks:** Summarize key insights and highlight next steps for collective action.

VI. Expected Outcomes:

- **Increased Awareness:** Dissemination of recent findings and evidence on the nexus between urbanization and social development, with emphasis on poverty eradication, productivity and employment, and social development.
- **Policy Commitments:** Concrete pledges from governments and partners to prioritize concrete actions for unlocking the potential of sustainable urbanization.

- **Network Building:** Strengthen collaboration among participants and lay the groundwork for implementing future initiatives and projects related to the topics discussed

VII. Conclusion:

The solution session presents a timely and strategic opportunity to deepen collective understanding of the complex relationship between rapid urbanization and social development in Africa. By bringing together national and local governments and development partners, it will serve as a platform for meaningful dialogue and knowledge exchange—grounded in practical experience and robust evidence. Through collaboration and a shared vision, the event will not only highlight key achievements and persistent challenges but will also help shape actionable strategies to advance social development, promote individual well-being, and strengthen the harmonious functioning of societies—core principles affirmed at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen and reaffirmed at the Second World Summit for Social Development in 2025.