

Focus :

URBANISATION AND POVERTY

ROUDBTABLE

THE IMPACT OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT ON POVERTY AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

[GE4]

Grand auditorium
Palais Brongniart

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MAIN FINDINGS

Cities are catalysts of progress and human development. However, they are also places where inequalities are concentrated. The efforts made in the areas of access to water and sanitation in cities are cancelled out by the growth of the urban population. The challenge is to render the urban sphere sustainable and easy to live in at the same time as it mutates and undergoes changes. 3.5 billion people now live in urban settings and this is forecast to rise to 70% of the global population by 2050. Almost one billion people live in informal, illegal neighborhoods bereft of services – and this represents the main form of urban expansion. In these insecure urban areas, public service providers are generally forbidden from installing networks and providing services for buildings that have been erected without building permission. The solution will have to be found by ensuring that all local actors are able to cooperate, through the correct political will and by acknowledging cities as organizing authorities. In order to help impoverished populations to integrate and to 'formalize' informal neighborhoods, pragmatic or even transitory solutions must be chosen. With any possible scenario that may arise, the only drivers of urban growth will be medium- and long-term urban planning and the setting up of basic infrastructure and services. These will also be the only way of preventing the growth of slums and the spread of poverty.

SPEAKERS

Alioune Badiane

Director, Project Office, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-Habitat

Simon Compaoré

Maire of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

François Grünewald

Executive and Scientific Director, URD Group

Guillaume Josse

Executive Director, Groupe Huit

Charles Josselin

Former Minister of the Cooperation and of the French speaking countries, Vice-president of the *Conseil général des Côtes d'Armor*, member of (RE)SOURCES

MODERATOR

Bernard de La Villardière

Journalist, M6

Chairman and Producer, Ligne de Front



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SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS

Urban growth and inequality

Guillaume Josse points out that poor neighborhoods are often the most illegal and ill-equipped, even though there are many possible scenarios that can arise. What they have in common is that they set themselves up outside of conventional structures. There are two cities that live side by side: the official city, structured and modern, and the spontaneous city, under-equipped and precarious. A consensus has formed surrounding the need to intervene within these neighborhoods in order to better integrate them into cities. At this point, a question arises regarding the means necessary to bring this about. Completely doing away with or restructuring these neighborhoods has been shown to be ineffective on a large scale, therefore flexible practices must be used, which are adapted to each individual neighborhood.

Alioune Badiane underscores the fact that in Africa, 80% of the 400 million individuals living in urban surroundings live in precarious areas which face problems regarding land, living conditions (education and health) and access to essential services. Their inhabitants are therefore not considered fully fledged citizens.

Simon Compaoré, believes that cities draw people in and **will continue to do so: this can be called the 'urban mirage'**. The speed at which people arrive does not allow African cities to organize themselves properly. In Ouagadougou, the city has decided to take control of the situation.

Charles Josselin highlights the fact that access to water and sanitation is the most significant indicator of where one stands on the poverty scale, with serious consequences in the field of health.

City environmental risks and vulnerabilities

Bernard de la Villardière notes that urban expansion brings with it inevitable tensions, regarding firstly resources, secondly drinking water and finally sewage disposal. Sewage quantities grow in proportion with the number of inhabitants and amount of water used and this has consequences on the environment and on health. These are some of the many problems that new city inhabitants have to face.

François Grünewald notes that cities were historically designed as areas set up for defense and trade, which is why they were initially established in strategic areas near rivers, coastlines and in valleys, thus areas at risk. To make things worse, impoverished populations colonized the potentially most dangerous areas in and around cities: spaces where living was unhealthy, which were prone to flooding and landslides. In Port-au-Prince, the outskirts of the city up in the hills are particularly vulnerable.

Integrating slums into the city

Charles Josselin outlines the point that we will have to make do with the fact that this phenomenon will be a long-lasting one. Therefore, there is a need to accept and equip slums as opposed to systematically moving them elsewhere. This is because in so doing, it is not only the habitat which is moved but one also sees the disappearance of a set of activities, distancing people and leaving them without transport. This thus reduces access to employment in rehousing areas.

For Guillaume Josse, poor neighborhoods face three types of exclusion: land, social and urban, each one feeding the others. The main challenge for projects which aim to bring about improvements is that this vicious circle has to be stopped in order to set off a virtuous development circle. Since it is not possible to do everything at the same time, needs must be prioritized. But one thing that is certain is that they must be recognized, or rather included in legislation, and the correct means have to be put in place – something which cannot be done without legal recognition.

Simon Compaoré points out that in Ouagadougou; the municipal authority has led a large project with the help of the French Development Agency (AFD), aiming to improve living conditions for the inhabitants of neighborhoods in the outskirts of the city. Firstly, drinking water has to be piped there and rehousing has to begin, because what everyone ultimately wants is a deed stating where one lives. In order to ensure that all the urban communes of Burkina Faso enter into this dynamic, a national decentralization commission has been set up.

Alioune Badiane points out that UN-Habitat is pushing for urban planning to be systematized. In Africa, land rights vary and are not limited to the right to property. For example, several countries apply and recognize certificates for occupying and living on land, water and

electricity bills and the 'simple papers' such as documents that give one the right to the city and therefore the right to life. Even though these solutions are short-term ones, they allow populations to envisage their own future in a city.

What will city conditions be like tomorrow?

Alioune Badiane believes that cities are a challenge and an opportunity for Africa. In eight years' time, the urban population of Africa will be larger than that of Europe. This future must be clearly thought out. We are facing a growing demand for international solidarity.

Guillaume Josse puts out a word of warning regarding the romanticism that can be felt for slums. People do not choose to live there; those living there do not show more solidarity than elsewhere and all want to leave. In these neighborhoods, there is no administration, no tax system, no money. Communities do not have the means to pay for infrastructures and public authorities do not have the means to help them. A city of 2 million inhabitants such as Ouagadougou has the same budget as the city of Noyon in France, with 17,000 inhabitants.

François Grünewald underlines the fact that the question of employment and the economic growth of cities will have to be sharply put into focus, since it can be noted that there are ever fewer jobs in cities as a result of deindustrialization, despite the fact that cities attract more and more individuals.

Charles Josselin believes that elected officials should be recognized as the most appropriate authority for setting priorities for development stakeholders. There is a need to massively strengthen international solidarity, which alas is being throttled by the global economic and financial situation, given the great efforts that need to be made in cities in the Global South. Efforts should also focus on transparency and the effectiveness of aid. The rise in power of emerging countries that are present in the international cooperation field creates a number of doubts. In the same way, it is important that development aid and NGOs do not focus solely on large capital cities, but also on medium-sized cities, where populations are also growing. Success must be highlighted and solidarity between people on the ground acknowledged. All these realities must be shared and publicized, a role which the media should play.

REPORTER

Nathalie de Lataillade
Chargée de mission (RE)SOURCES

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