



28 February 2014. The predicted doubling of Africa's population in the next 25 years will further increase the enormous challenges already faced by African cities according to a new UN-Habitat report.

The new [report](#) published today by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) states that the total African population is set to nearly double to almost two billion over the next 25 years. If current demographic trends persist, by 2030, its population could exceed that of Europe, South America and North America combined.

This vast demographic expansion will add many more people to cities that are already deeply troubled by pervasive unemployment and poverty, deficient services provision, and dire lack of affordable housing. Lagos (Nigeria) has recently joined the list of the world's mega cities (10+ million people) - Africa's second after Cairo (Egypt) - while Kinshasa (DRC) is also projected to become a megacity in a few years' time. In the not too distant future, other African capitals will follow suit.

The report titled *The State of African Cities 2014: Re-imagining sustainable urban transitions* was launched on the sidelines of the fifth session of the African Ministerial Conference on

Housing and Urban Development (AMCHUD).

But, according to the UN, it is not in its largest cities where the African urban transition mostly unfolds. Rather, an estimated three quarters of the anticipated urban population growth will have to be absorbed by intermediate size and small cities. These towns generally have even fewer urban management capacities than their larger counterparts. Therefore, the report warns, the urban slums already so emblematic for many large African cities may soon also become a prominent feature of the smaller cities.

Moreover, the report states, Africa's already formidable urban challenges will become further aggravated by the predicted or already felt negative impacts of climate and environmental change. African cities large and small will increasingly become more exposed to additional vulnerabilities and risks, ranging from temperature increases, changing rainfall patterns, as well as predicted more frequent and severe droughts, floods and storms. Given the high concentration of African urban populations in coastal areas, there is also threat of inundation through sea level rise and storm surges that may affect millions. Climate and environmental change are likely to also cause more vulnerability to urban food, water and energy insecurity.

African nations require large investments in road, rail and energy networks to boost their urban economies and unlock sparsely-populated areas. Further nation- and institution-building is needed to overcome weak urban governance and still high corruption incidence. Africa should consider moving away from promoting low urban densities and private car-dependent cities. It should attempt to decouple urban developments from wasteful natural resource demands that can simply not be sustained. Since Africa is in still comparatively early phases of its urban transition, the continent is in a privileged position to re-conceptualize what constitute its best options in the light of the inevitable and rapidly-unfolding urban growth.

*Photo caption: A street vendor and his wares at Hamar Weyne Market in the Somali capital Mogadishu. UN Photo/Stuart Price.*