

Commonwealth Secretariat

---



**Commonwealth Consultative Group on  
Human Settlements**

Gigiri, Nairobi, 31 March 2009

---

**Provisional Agenda Item 3**

**CCGHS(09)1**

**State of Commonwealth Cities Report: A Scoping Study**

A Paper by the Commonwealth Secretariat

Commonwealth Secretariat  
Marlborough House  
Pall Mall  
London SW1Y 5HX

March 2009

## State of the Commonwealth Cities: A Scoping Study<sup>i</sup>

The Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned a study on the scope for producing a ‘State of Commonwealth Cities’ report. This responds to mandates from a range of different Commonwealth forums representing different spheres of governance and those that are involved as key partners in the Commonwealth’s partnership on human settlements issues, ComHabitat.

At the last Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS) held in 2007, Ministers called for greater monitoring of member states’ progress towards the Commonwealth goal.

The Commonwealth Principles on Good Practice for Local Democracy and Good Governance (the ‘Aberdeen Agenda’), endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their meeting in 2005 and reaffirmed in 2007, specifically contain the principle of inclusiveness. The New Delhi Statement on Inclusive Cities and the Urban Poor also calls on cities to promote the concept of ‘*inclusive cities*’ in their policy-making, and to develop, where possible ‘MDG-specific targets’ which measure the progress being made towards attaining the MDGs at local level and for the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) to promote establishment of a Forum of Inclusive Cities.

The Communiqué from the Commonwealth People’s Forum (CPF)<sup>1</sup> in Kampala in November 2007 called on “*Commonwealth Member States, and the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements to produce a ‘State of the Commonwealth’s Cities’ report for the next CHOGM, which would assess opportunities and threats of urban growth in relation to poverty alleviation, sustainable and people-centred development and reducing disparities in living conditions, and would recommend inter-governmental actions.*”

The background to the study is that in 2001 the Commonwealth committed to the goal of “demonstrated progress towards adequate shelter for all with secure tenure and access to essential services in every community by 2015”. However, more than half way along the track, there has been no systematic analysis of, and reporting on, what is happening in Commonwealth cities, and no concerted mobilisation of urban policy makers and NGOs across the Commonwealth for action on human settlements. This is despite the massive scale and rapid pace of urbanisation we now experience and the urbanisation of poverty and the environmental impact of urban growth.

If poverty reduction systems are to work, it needed analytical and comparative information on urban conditions and also assessment and sharing of policies. The Commonwealth goal quoted above could make an important contribution to the sustainable management of cities on a global scale but without some method of measurement and supporting processes, it will be difficult to achieve.

---

<sup>i</sup>This work will also be taken forward by ComHabitat partners at their annual meetings including, the CLGF meeting in the Bahamas 10-14 May 2009 and to preparations for the Commonwealth People’s Forum and CHOGM in November 2009.

<sup>1</sup> The CPF – Commonwealth People’s Forum is the meeting for civil society held prior to the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

In response to these mandates and issues, and in preparation for this year's CCGHS meeting, a scoping study on the state of Commonwealth cities has been prepared (see the annex to this paper), with the following objectives:

- To provide an evidence base for the CCGHS about the situation of human settlements across the Commonwealth countries, particularly in relation to the 2001 Commonwealth goal quoted above;
- To explore the scope to establish a Commonwealth Network of Inclusive Cities as a policy and practice exchange between a representative group of local authorities, with scope also to involve civil society organisations from these cities. A preliminary list of twelve potential cities for the Network has been identified - Ahmedabad, Birmingham, Brisbane, Durban, Freetown, Hyderabad, Kuala Lumpur, Dar-es-Salaam, Metro Vancouver, Port of Spain, Johannesburg, and Port Moresby;
- To scope the form that an on-going State of the Commonwealth Cities study could take.

### **Key messages from the scoping study exercise**

- There is a need to agree on the terms and indicators that are required to monitor the Commonwealth goal and further work needs to be done to measure them.
- Using readily available data on indicators, we can see only very little progress towards the Commonwealth goal, since 1999.
- In order to make demonstrable progress towards many of the key Commonwealth objectives, and the Millennium Development Goals, the challenge of urbanisation needs to be recognised now and effective monitoring systems need to be developed collaboratively.
- A State of the Commonwealth's Cities Report would be the first step towards achieving such progress.

The Commonwealth has the potential to lead global thinking and practice for human settlements. It includes rapidly growing mega cities from the global South (e.g. Lagos) and pace-setters for developing sustainable cities in the North (e.g. Vancouver). At least eight Commonwealth member countries have slum growth rates of 5% a year or more<sup>2</sup>. Yet currently knowledge within the Commonwealth of how to manage human settlements is fragmented and unfocussed.

A regular State of the Cities report will become a catalyst for action locally, nationally and bi-laterally. A **report** is needed, but the report should be an integral part of a **process** which raises awareness, facilitates knowledge transfer, and involves a range of stakeholders in transforming cities to deliver the urban related MDGs. This process would also contribute to ComHabitat's strategic objectives of improving investment; strengthening leadership and governance; and reducing risk and building community resilience. Commonwealth networks connect national governments, local governments, professional associations, civil society and business. These provide exceptional potential to address the inter-connected nature of urban challenges.

The objectives of such a report would be:

- To create a focus for discussion and action of Commonwealth governments, particularly through creating a reporting mechanism to CCGHS and CHOGM;

---

<sup>2</sup> UN Habitat (2003) *Slums of the World: the face of poverty in the new millennium?* Nairobi:UN-Habitat

- To create a partnership of cities that are representative of the human settlements challenges and policy responses;
- To encourage greater dialogue between central governments, local governments and civil society in relation to key urban development issues;
- To measure progress towards the Commonwealth goal of “demonstrated progress towards adequate shelter for all with secure tenure and access to essential services in every community by 2015”.

### **Issues for Decision**

Ministers are invited to:

- Consider the importance of good indicators in tracking progress towards the MDGs and the Commonwealth goal on human settlements as well as in meeting other key Commonwealth objectives;
- Endorse the list of cities identified for the pilot phase of the study;
- Commit to supporting a full State of Commonwealth’s Cities Report.