

Special panel session

Planning regional futures

From a Sub-Saharan Africa perspective

1. What you see as the strengths of current approaches?

- Spatial regional planning long dead across most of SS Africa.
- South Africa an exception – attempts to overcome spatial inequalities from the apartheid era:
 - Spatial targeting of incentives on regions/nodes with economic growth potential.
 - But countered with a rural emphasis in the Zuma era – generally confused and contradictory set of initiatives.

2. What you see as the weaknesses of current approaches?

- Most African countries have out-dated planning legislation inherited from colonial times.
- Strong anti-urban bias in many African countries – rural voter base.
- Weak, and poorly staffed and resourced governments, planning powers highly centralised.
- Regional institutional governance largely missing (other than in SA).
- Large-scale projects (based on resource extraction or new ‘fantasy’ cities) driven by global private sector players, bypassing established laws and processes.

3. Where are the opportunities to move things forward?

- Perhaps a revival of interest in ‘territorial’ regional planning in Africa through its prominence in SDG 11 and the New Urban Agenda.
- But problematic position here largely ignoring economic dynamics.
- National Urban Policies seen as the ‘low hanging fruit’ of SDG process. NUPs – multi-scalar approach to addressing rapid urbanisation and economic growth.

4. What are some of the major challenges to overcome?

- Very rapid urbanisation – urban population doubling in 20 years.
- Migrations driven by war, climate change, land grabs.
- Cities NOT engines of economic growth – poor correlation between urban growth and economic development.
- Anti-urban political sentiment – poor state investment in cities.
- Dealing with the issue of land – who owns or controls it. Not a usual regional planning issue.

5. What is your vision for planning regional futures?

- Institutional and legal reform to co-ordinate sectoral governance - at national, regional and local scales.
- Decentralised governance to allow far more local planning action. No one approach to regional planning – depends on history and context.
- Incorporates a concern with land – control, regulation, ownership.
- NUPs which promote a focus on urban areas and principles of equity, inclusion, sustainability.