



# A National Urban Policy for Liberia | Discussion Paper

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**Cities Alliance**  
Cities Without Slums

## A NATIONAL URBAN POLICY FOR LIBERIA: DISCUSSION PAPER

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*Initiated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Government of Liberia and the Monrovia City Corporation, the Cities Alliance Liberia Country Programme aims to strengthen the organisation and meaningful participation of slum dwellers and working poor organisations in city governance, improve climate-resilient and inclusive urban planning, slum upgrading and incremental housing strategies as well as enhance the national enabling environment for Liberian cities. The Programme is a joint partnership between Comic Relief, Department of Human Settlements, Government of South Africa, Habitat for Humanity International, Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), StreetNet International, United Cities and Local Governments Africa (UCLGA), UN-Habitat, UNOPS, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), and the YMCA.*

*Sustainable urban development in Africa is a key priority in UN-Habitat's normative and operational work. In this context, Booyoung Co., Ltd provides financial support over a period of ten years from 2012 to 2021, to support the development of UN-Habitat urban planning projects in African cities and countries. In Liberia, a National Urban Forum convened in June 2015 brought together urban stakeholders to initiate a road map for a National Urban Policy process. In July 2015, President Johnson-Sirleaf launched the NUP process in Monrovia.*

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# COUNTRY PROFILE: KEY FIGURES AND FACTS



<sup>1</sup> Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After two destructive civil conflicts between 1989 and 2003, Liberia's proactive efforts to revive its economy and development are reflected by the improvements and reconstruction taking place in its cities. With a return to democratic rule have come notable progressive strides towards economic recovery, rehabilitation of public infrastructure services, and inclusive governance. There has also been a disproportionate rate of urbanisation and urban primacy; Monrovia, the capital, is home to 40 per cent of the national population and a commercial, international, trade and economic nucleus of the country. As a result, challenges generated by unplanned urbanisation are significant and threaten to impede national development.

If Liberia is to achieve inclusive economic growth and sustainable urban development, it urgently needs an enabling framework to provide coordination among different sectors and ministries, address urban challenges, and maximise the opportunities offered by urbanisation, while mitigating potential adverse externalities. A National Urban Policy (NUP) is such a framework and mechanism for coordination.

A NUP is a coherent set of decisions derived through a deliberate, government-led process of coordinating and rallying various actors for a common vision and goal that will promote more transformative, productive, inclusive and resilient urban development in the long term. Developing

the NUP for Liberia is expected to coordinate the work of different sectors, establish incentives for more sustainable practices, and spur a balanced system of cities and towns through strengthening urban-rural linkages and equitable resources allocation. This will not only help reduce urban and territorial disparities within and among regions, but also promote institutional collaboration and policy coherence towards achievement of the Liberia National Vision 2030.

As the United Nations focal point for sustainable urbanisation and human settlements, UN-Habitat has been supporting the NUP development process in Liberia launched by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf at the first National Urban Forum in 2015. Since 2016, UN-Habitat has further renewed its commitment to promote NUP as a mainstream tool for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially target 11.b. The ongoing policy development in partnership with the Ministry of Internal Affairs is part of a broader endeavour to support poverty reduction by integrating the urban economy into national development policies and the development of sustainable, resilient Liberian cities.

UN-Habitat suggests five phases for the NUP development process to ensure the quality of to the policy: 1) feasibility, 2) diagnostic, 3) formulation, 4) implementation, 5) monitoring and evaluation. To initiate development of a NUP

## BOX 1 Ten Policy Focus Areas and Three Overarching Interventions Proposed by the Liberia NUP Discussion Paper

Ten policy focus areas are proposed to promote a NUP for Liberia that is forward-looking, focused on poverty reduction, and considers cross-cutting issues:

1. Strengthening small and intermediate cities
2. Focusing on the Greater Monrovia District
3. Encouraging spatial development strategies
4. Restoring infrastructure and basic services
5. Prioritising education and employment
6. Emphasising on land and housing
7. Recognising the significance and relevance of environment
8. Reinforcing demographic planning, regulation and monitoring
9. Promoting jurisdictional coordination and policy coherence
10. Institutionalising political, financial, technical and participatory mechanisms



for Liberia, this Discussion Paper, a key output of the feasibility phase, explains the context in which the policy will operate. The paper is the result of a wide range of research and consultations on the demographic, socio-economic, and physical environment aspects of the country. It also provides preliminary policy recommendations (Box 1) for further analysis in the subsequent NUP development processes. The paper will be distributed to all urban stakeholders, including national governments, local authorities, civil societies, planning professionals, and the private sector to build consensus on what has been discussed and agreed and to stimulate active support for further diagnostic, policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Development of the NUP for Liberia is designed to complement and operationalise Liberia's long-term national development framework *Liberia National Vision 2030*, which seeks to propel Liberia to middle-income status by 2030. It is also expected

to help achieve goals set out in the *Vision 2030* by creating conditions that will make the desired urban future a reality.

This paper emphasises that crafting a NUP for Liberia must directly involve all actors responsible for urban affairs – central government, local authorities, ministries and agencies, civil society, private sector and academic institutions. This participatory spirit resonates with the proposals by major global agendas such as the *African Agenda 2063 Framework* which advocates, as one of its seven aspirations, development that is people-driven and relies on their potential.<sup>2</sup> Consultations have been, and will continue to be, organised to ensure wide stakeholder participation to safeguard an open, collaborative, peaceful policy-making process (Box 2).

The Paper calls on all stakeholders to collaborate closely and effectively with the Government of Liberia to develop and implement this NUP.

## BOX 2 Institutional Setups, Steps and Key Events on NUP Discussion Paper for Liberia

1. **June 2016 – The National Habitat Committee (NHC)** is set up as the political supervision and decision-making body for the policy development process.
2. **June 2016 – Awareness Raising Campaign and Stakeholder Consultation** are conducted in Monrovia to discuss the critical contributions the policy could make to guiding Liberia's sustainable urbanisation.
3. **Aug 2016 – The Technical Support Team (TST)** is established to provide expertise and technical guidance
4. **Feb 2017 – Training and Policy Dialogues** are organised in Monrovia to deepen urban actors' understanding of the policy-shaping process and to stimulate in-depth discussion on sectorial policies and legislative frameworks.
5. **May 2017 – Peer Learning and Experience Sharing** through the participation of Liberian delegates at the OECD's Second International Conference on National Urban Policies in Paris, France.
6. **April to July 2017 – Three validation workshops** on the paper are convened with various levels (sectors) of stakeholder groups, including mayors, the urban poor

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