

# REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITIES ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR KENYA

Towards a New Regional Planning  
Model in Kenya



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## Towards a New Regional Planning Model in Kenya

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# **REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITIES ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR KENYA**

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# Executive Summary

Since independence, Kenyan Government has designed different regional development policies and strategies aimed at achieving spatial balance in development amongst and within different regions in the country. Key among them is the 1974 regional development approach for national development planning that established six Regional Development Authorities (RDAs), which are based on rivers, and large water-body basins and covering the whole country. The six RDAs are charged with the mandate of spurring integrated regional development to address equitable and balanced socio-economic development in the country and have been involved in implementation of integrated programmes and interventions of strategic national importance and in ensuring that resources in these regions are utilized in the most optimal and sustainable manner with minimum duplication of efforts and resource use conflict.

The complexity of regional planning as a process necessitates RDAs to have a wide knowledge and experiences base if they have to harnessing existing

opportunities and address regional challenges. They need a handy reference guide to do a broader analysis of regional issues and trends that should be based on sound and comparable information if they have to develop sound regional development policies and plans toward sound economic development of the country.

This publication addresses fundamental issues in regional development giving emphasis on operational challenges of the RDAs and how they can effectively harness opportunities created by the new constitution to align their functions and mandates towards regional development. It further gives an analysis on the importance of RDAs engaging with UN-Habitat with a wide experience in regional and metropolitan planning issues towards addressing planning, social, economic, environmental and institutional challenges hindering their competitiveness. Strategies, mechanisms and tools of linking and working with national and sub-national governments as well as other relevant development sectors are referred.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Overview of Regional Development in Kenya

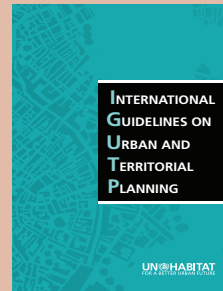
Kenya has been grappling with the problem of unbalanced regional development even after decades of experimenting with different economic and social policies. Wide regional disparities still exist between and within urban and rural regions. The regional inequalities have not only constrained growth but have also been a source of political and social conflicts. Like in any other unequitable society, economic growth has been slower.

The concept of regional development has been used by many nations as a strategy to address problems of duality in economic development, poverty and environmental sustainability through enhancing equity in resource distribution and utilization. Regional development in Kenya has been done through the concept of a shared common natural resource “water catchment”. Demarcation of Regional Development Authorities (RDAs) has been done along drainage basins and across administrative boundaries with the premise that geographical subdivisions remove politics from the center of development. The authorities are charged with mandate of spurring integrated regional development and bring equitable and balanced socio-economic development in the country. Thus they have a big potential in complementing central and county government’s efforts in wealth and employment creation at regional and national levels. However, in their operations, RDAs are faced with key constraints including absence of regional development policy and plans, inadequate development funding, dependency on the exchequer for their recurrent and capital requirements, enactment of overlapping Acts of parliament such as Water Act, Irrigation Act, Power Act, Environmental Management and Coordination Act etc. diluting their mandates and diverting funds to other institutions for activities meant to be implemented by RDAs inhibit them from achieving their objectives.

## 1.2 Comparative Advantage in Engaging with UN-Habitat

For over forty years, UN-Habitat has been supporting cities, regional and national authorities to address development challenges. To provide guidance on planning and policy at the metropolitan, regional and national scales, the agency’s Regional and Metropolitan Planning Unit (RMPU) conducts activities in knowledge management, tools development, capacity development, policy dialogue, partnership development, technical assistance and advisory services. The unit’s tested approaches, guidelines and tools, support management of growth and improve sustainability, efficiency and equity through planning and design at the different scales. A case example is the International Guidelines for Urban and Territorial Planning (IG-UTP) which provide national governments, local authorities, civil society organizations and planning professionals with a global reference framework that promotes more compact, socially inclusive, better integrated and connected cities and territories that foster sustainable urban development and are resilient to climate change.

### International Guidelines for Urban and Territorial Planning (IG-UTP)



International Guidelines for Urban and Territorial Planning (IG-UTP) have been designed as a universal framework and a reference document integrating three dimensions of urban policy principles (why plan?), management processes (how to plan?) and technical products (what urban and territorial plans?). They are an instrument to promote sound urban and territorial planning around the world, based on universally agreed principles and national, regional and local experience, as well as a broad network to guide urban policy reforms, taking into account the specific approaches, visions, models and tools existing in each country.

Source: UN-Habitat 2015a

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