



UN HABITAT

Regional and Technical Cooperation Division



# ERITREA: NATIONAL AND CITIES URBAN PROFILE

ASMARA, MASSAWA & MENDEFERA



Eritrea National and Cities Profile

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# ERITREA: NATIONAL AND CITIES URBAN PROFILE

## ASMARA, MASSAWA & MENDEFERA

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME

REGIONAL AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION DIVISION

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## FOREWORDS

The annual urban growth rate in Sub-Saharan Africa is almost 5 percent twice as high as in Latin America and Asia. It also has the world's largest proportion of urban residents living in slums, which today are home to 72 percent of urban Africa's citizens representing a total of some 187 million people. As more and more people seek a better life in towns and cities, the urban slum population in Africa is projected to double every 15 years in a process known as the urbanization of poverty. African cities are thus confronted in the new Millennium with the problem of accommodating the rapidly growing urban populations in inclusive cities, providing them with adequate shelter and basic urban services, while ensuring environmental sustainability, as well as enhancing economic growth and development.



UN-HABITAT is the lead agency for implementation of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 7, Target 10 (reducing by half the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water), and Target 11 (achieving significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020).

As part of our drive to address this crisis, UN-HABITAT is working with the European Commission (EC) to support sustainable urban development in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. Given the urgent and diverse needs, the agency found it necessary to develop a tool for rapid assessment to guide immediate, mid- and long-term interventions.

In 2004, UN-HABITAT's Regional Office for Africa and the Arab States took the initiative to develop the approach for application in over 20 countries. This was achieved in collaboration with other departments within the agency – the Urban Development Branch with the Urban Environment Section, the Global Urban Observatory, the Shelter Branch, the Urban Governance Unit, the Gender Policy Unit, the

Environment Unit and the Training and Capacity Building Branch. This new corporate approach is known as the Urban Profiling. The implementation of the Urban Profiling was launched thanks to contributions from the Governments of Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands. Today, UN-HABITAT is conducting city profiles in 18 new countries as part of the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme financed by EuropeAid and its Intra-ACP fund. Also, Ethiopia, as well as 12 other African countries, are going to develop action plans for selected priority proposals presented in this document, the second phase of the new programme. The idea behind the urban profiling is to help formulate urban poverty reduction policies at the local, national and regional levels through a rapid, participatory, crosscutting, holistic and action-orientated assessment of needs. It is also aimed at enhancing dialogue, awareness of opportunities and challenges aiming at identifying response mechanisms as a contribution to the implementation of the MDGs.

The approach addresses four main themes: governance, slums, gender and HIV/AIDS, and environment. It seeks to build a national profile, and three settlements representing the capital or a large city, a medium-sized city, and a small town. The profiles offer an overview of the urban situation in each participating city through a series of interviews with key urban actors. This is followed by a city consultation where priorities are agreed. City-level findings provide input for the national profiling that is combined with a national assessment of institutional, legislative, financial and overall enabling frameworks and response mechanisms. The profiles at all levels result in supporting the formation of city and national strategies and policy development. Additionally, the profiling facilitates sub-regional analyses, strategies and common policies through identification of common needs and priorities at the sub-regional level. This provides guidance to international external support agencies in the development of their responses in the form of capacity building tools.

In Eritrea, the profiling was undertaken under the leadership of national and local authorities. This initiative has been carried out locally as well as



nationally. The Eritrea Urban Profile focuses on the findings of a desk-study, interviews with key actors, and country-wide consultations with key urban actors and institutions. Consultation participants agreed to address the salient urban issues including poverty, insecurity, corruption, pollution and crime - all problems that negatively affect investments and economic development. A consensus was reached on priority interventions in the form of programme and project proposals to be implemented.

I wish to acknowledge the contributions of Mohamed El Sioufi, who developed the concept of the urban profiling and Alain Grimard who is the Programme Manager. I also wish to cite those members of staff for their role in helping produce this report. They include Alioune Badiane, Kerstin Sommer, Clarissa Augustinus, Mohamed Halfani, Lucia Kiwala, Eduardo Moreno, and Raf Tuts.

I also look forward to supporting further their efforts in the urban development of Eritrea.



**Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka**  
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations,  
and Executive Director, UN-HABITAT

Historical evidences indicate that Urban Development in Eritrea dates back to the ancient times. However, it is during the Italian Colonial Period (1890 - 1941) that these ancient towns begun to flourish into modern planned towns and cities. Asmara, the Capital, was planned to an industrial town while Massawa and Assab were planned as port towns.



Mendefera and the remaining towns were planned as military garrison centers, mining, and agricultural towns. The British Colonial Period (1941 - 1952) was short and there was no significant improvement in the development and functioning of urban centers in the Country during this period. The period of Ethiopian Colonization (1952 - 1991) was also marked with the exploitation of urban centers and dismantling of the industrial establishments causing large scale destruction in Eritrea.

After Eritrea gained its independence in 1991, massive reconstruction and rehabilitation of urban facilities took place and the Government initiated a series of reforms placing governance at the forefront of its actions. However, the challenge awaiting is so great that it needs more commitment.

These and other urban related problems are posing strains on the limited resources the Government managed to gather. To adequately address these urban issues the Government is determined to work in partnership with all urban stakeholders and development partners. The Government's determination towards this cause is demonstrated through its participation in the urban Profiling. This rapid assessment of the urban issues helped to identify the priorities of the urban needs and propose remedial solutions. The Government strongly believes this participation in the exercise will lead into fruitful engagements.

Reiterating the Government's commitment to realize, with the assistance of its development partners, all the proposed recommendations forwarded in the Urban Profiling exercise, I would like on behalf of the Government of Eritrea, to express my appreciation to all who took part in developing this valuable document. My thanks are also extended to UN-HABITAT, the European Union and its member states who helped to produce the Urban Profiling document.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Abraha Asfaha'.

**Honourable Abraha Asfaha**  
Minister for Public Works  
Ministry of Public Works

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## INTRODUCTION

Urban Profiling is an assessment of needs and capacity building gaps at the city level. It is currently being implemented in over 20 countries in Africa and the Arab States. Urban Profiling uses a structured approach where priority interventions are agreed upon through consultative processes. The Urban Profiling methodology consists of three phases: (1) a rapid participatory urban profiling, at national and local levels, focusing on Governance, Slums, Gender and HIV/AIDS, Environment, and proposed interventions; (2) detailed priority proposals; and (3) project implementation. RUSPS in Eritrea encompasses a national profile, and a single profile for the cities of Asmara, Massawa and Mendefera. This national report constitutes a general background, a synthesis of the four themes, Governance, Slums, Gender and HIV/AIDS, and Environment, and priority project proposals, both at national and city levels.

## GOVERNANCE

The Government of Eritrea has since independence initiated a series of reforms with a view to decentralizing governance structures. The most notable and significant administrative reform undertaken by the government was abolishing the colonial provincial boundaries and reconstituting these according to development requirements and resources. As a result, six administrative regions were created under the Ministry of Local Government. The government appoints a

regional governor, and a regional council (Baito) is in charge of implementing national policies at the regional level. Additionally, the government initiated reforms to streamline the civil service and transfer civil servants to regional administrations. The reforms included training civil servants for more effective service provision. Furthermore, the Government of Eritrea created a National Agency for the Supervision and Privatization of Public Enterprises as part of the implementation of a macro economic policy to establish an efficient and outward looking economy led by the private sector. After the 1998 border conflict with Ethiopia, the government has played a major role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the economy. Increasing the allocation of resources is critical due to the weak private sector and limited capacity.

## SLUMS

Slums in Eritrea are characterized by poverty and poor living conditions, with substandard housing, overcrowding and limited access to urban services. Slum residents are largely tenants. Overall policies and practices to address the needs of people in slum areas are poorly developed and many slum residents feel forgotten and neglected. Strategic urban planning, coupled with local economic development strategies and environmental planning, is essential for reducing spatial and economic inequalities in the urban areas. To comprehensively address urban poverty, the needs of slum residents must be considered in the planning process.



## GENDER AND HIV/AIDS

There is a favourable environment promoting gender equality in the nation since the government instituted policies to promote women's issues. The National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) is active in promoting gender-related issues and the overall development of Eritrean women. This is partly the legacy of the struggle for independence, which saw the active participation of women on all fronts.

In general, HIV/AIDS prevalence rates are relatively low in Eritrea, with a national infection rate of 2.7 percent. But in recent years infection rates have been on the increase, with infected women outnumbering men. Infection rates are higher in urban areas than in the rural communities. As a response mechanism, the government's HAMSET programme (HIV/AIDS, Malaria, STIs and Tuberculosis) is actively fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

## ENVIRONMENT

Rapid urbanization puts pressure on the urban environment. Increasing numbers of vehicles, unplanned settlements, poverty levels, deforestation, loss of biodiversity and polluting industries negatively affect the urban environment. The urban poor suffer more from environmental degradation because they depend on natural resources like wood, water and fishing for their daily survival. To cope with the negative environmental impacts of urbanization, it is important that the Government of Eritrea comes up with measures



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