

## **THE MILLENNIUM CITIES INITIATIVE: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO REDUCING URBAN POVERTY AND GENERATING SUSTAINABLE PROSPERITY**

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In recent years official development assistance has trended toward sectoral support, filling pressing needs in the domains of public health, water and sanitation, education, or governance. With this approach, donors are able to see and monitor progress in their chosen areas, take pride in a sense of accomplishment, and report these accomplishments back to their constituencies, including taxpayers who, feeling a sharp economic pinch themselves, may be questioning that overseas development assistance should continue to be a national government priority. One unhappy consequence of this explicitly segmented approach is that the notion of the urban region as an integrated organism, requiring a full, coordinated diet of multi-sector interventions to ensure its ongoing economic, social, and environmental health, has faded into the background.

Strangely, and somewhat incoherently, this tendency coincides with the global embrace of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of fundamental objectives adopted by the United Nations and aimed at improving access to such fundamental human rights as health, education, clean water and sanitation, gender equality, environmental protection, and sustainable economic development. As the limited success of even the best sector-focused development projects have revealed, the MDGs can be fully achieved only in concert: if the farmer is unlucky enough to succumb to malaria during the planting season, no matter the improved seeds or fertilizers he has been given, he will not be able to get them into the ground in time for the rainy season. If the elimination of fees and provision of better equipped facilities make it possible for young girls to finish elementary school, but their families then need them to spend their days collecting water rather than attending secondary school, those girls will not achieve their potential either as learners or earners, distinct gender inequality will persist and the much-needed demographic transition to a diminished total fertility rate probably will not occur.

In cities and urban regions, an integrated approach is just as essential: the mother who walks an hour each way to gather cooking fuel or to bring a sick child to the local clinic is neither earning nor studying during that hour, because the bus doesn't go where she needs, or even if it does, it costs too much.

To demonstrate the importance of a full frontal approach to achieving the Goals in urban areas, the Earth Institute at Columbia University launched the Millennium Cities Initiative during 2005 in order to assist mid-sized sub-Saharan African cities address these complex challenges. The current roster of Millennium Cities includes: Mekelle, Ethiopia; Kumasi, Ghana; Kisumu, Kenya; Blantyre, Malawi; Bamako and Segou, Mali; Akure and Kaduna, Nigeria, and Louga, Senegal. In general, the cities chosen are capitals of the regions where the Millennium Villages Project, another Earth Institute initiative, is assisting smallholder farmers in making the transition from sub-subsistence agriculture to sustainable commercial agriculture together with related non-agricultural economic activities.<sup>[1]</sup>

With more than half of the world's population now living in towns, cities, and the clear majority of the world's gross national income coming from urbanized regions, it is clearly vital that the fundamental human rights embodied in the MDGs be achieved in urban areas. Indeed, to escape extreme poverty and ascend the ladder of economic growth and development, one essential component of a necessarily complex set of solutions includes strong and well-functioning cities. Urban regions must be capable of delivering essential human services, constructing and managing adequate infrastructure, transportation, and telecommunications connectivity, and supporting a healthy, productive, and engaged citizenry with access to the essential exchange of information necessary both to thrive in the today's global economy and to participate in the international community of ideas. Succeeding in this quest by the MDG target date of 2015 will require a series of systematically conceived, carefully targeted, wide-ranging interventions across all economic and social sectors. Measuring the size of the gap in each sector, thinking deeply about how to meet these challenges, and aiding this carefully selected group of cities in their efforts to do so constitutes the main purpose of the MCI.

Strengthening farm-to-market linkages is a key strategy for promoting economic development in these urban regions. Once the farmers in the Millennium Villages begin harvesting significant agricultural surpluses, their next move is to add value to their production by taking full advantage of urban infrastructure for agricultural processing, manufacturing, transportation, and distribution of their products to domestic, regional and international markets. Helping to transform these combined rural-urban dynamics into regional economic growth engines is central to MCI's agenda.

Toward this end, the MCI is helping to mobilize substantial public and private capital investment long overdue in all of the Millennium Cities – primarily in infrastructure, but also in a variety of economic and social sectors capable of creating local livelihood opportunities that enable businesses and households to thrive in place rather be forced to migrate to Africa's overcrowded "megacities" such as Nairobi, Dakar, Lagos, and Kinshasa. To galvanize business enterprise development, the MCI seeks to offer entrepreneurial training, expand access to private financing, and, wherever possible, to strengthen microfinance institutions by expanding the scope, quality, and range of financial and educational services they provide.

To further advance the global MDG agenda, the MCI is matching external partners with the Millennium Cities to help meet clearly identified needs in the social sector. Bi- and multilateral, corporate and non-profit development partners have already delivered to these severely underserved metropolitan areas whole series of medical trainings, screenings and other direct services; medical supplies and equipment, and research expertise in a wide spectrum of fields, from preventing gender violence and fostering early childhood development, to enhancing the regulatory environment for investment and increasing the potential for carbon trading under the Kyoto Protocols.

To accomplish these objectives, the MCI has adopted a five-part methodology, beginning with two distinct areas of investigation undertaken in each Millennium City: 1) a series of needs assessments and cost analysis for key MDG-related sectors, more precisely measuring the steps required to achieve the MDGs in such areas as public health, education, water and sanitation, and gender equality; 2) the concurrent formulation, through careful research, of a public and private investment strategy predicated on the city's and region's strongest assets, while identifying and leveraging essential infrastructure improvements to help attract and retain increased inflows of foreign direct investment. These two research trajectories converge in the third phase of our work, when MCI's findings are shared with stakeholders so that, as fully informed citizens, they can determine their own development priorities and generate a comprehensive development strategy for their city and urban region.

In the course of MCI's initial research phases, stakeholders' views are solicited -- as consumers of public services, public officials, business owners, operators, managers, and employees – regarding the most glaring economic, social, and physical deficits and how to remedy these. During this third phase of MCI's work, participatory engagement and local ownership become central, as urban residents and leaders, fortified by MCI's research findings, seek consensus as to which MDGs might be pursued and at what cost.

For example, key stakeholders might decide to press for a couple of "quick wins" such as relatively low-cost installation of girls' latrines in schools, which has been demonstrated to substantially increase girls' school enrollment, especially in relation to the modest cost of such an investment. Alternatively, stakeholders may choose major infrastructure investments, including water filtration plants or trunk roads, either of which can be highly beneficial in enhancing public health, school attendance, livelihood options, the efficiency of trade, and access to markets. The top-ranked priorities will become the basis for the fourth phase in our work: helping each city to generate a fully integrated, MDG-based City Development Strategy that incorporates those aspects of the investment and social-sector agendas deemed most important by the citizens and their leaders.

These City Development Strategies are vital for achieving nationwide economic, social, and governance decentralization, enabling local and regional governments to seek long-term financing from national governments and global donors solely on the basis of technical criteria and proven needs. Such economic strategies must be bold enough to budget sufficient resources for 100-percent MDG accomplishment over time, and they must be responsible for building into their strategies accountability, transparency, and ongoing monitoring to ensure a clear and direct correlation between the level of financial support and the actual immediate and long-term results.

The MCI will assist the Millennium Cities and their stakeholders at all stages of this investment and development process, by facilitating extensive consultation and collaboration among the various citizen stakeholder communities. Such activities include assisting each city to draft, review, revise, and approve its integrated MDG strategy; advising city officials on how to engage and obtain support from their respective regional and national governments, and then, in partnership with national government leaders, presenting the strategy to appropriate international donors and investors with the relevant interests and desired capabilities.<sup>[2]</sup>

Finally, the MCI will produce a handbook to document the process of generating these comprehensive urban development strategies. In addition, the MCI will offer workshops for current and future Millennium City public and private sector leaders, to discuss best practices and lessons learned.

To give some perspective, the following paragraphs describe in greater depth the social aspects of the MCI project and the needs assessments, the household survey, and the representations to various stakeholders of the relevant findings resulting from this research.

The MCI's Needs Assessment instruments were developed by the United Nations Millennium Project, under the overall direction of then-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and his Special Advisor, Earth Institute Director Jeffrey D. Sachs, as part of the UN Millennium Project's effort to help both beneficiary and donor governments understand the gaps in MDG coverage and the costs of adequately addressing such funding gaps. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) currently manages these tools and techniques through the UNDP Poverty Unit's MDG Support Group.<sup>[3]</sup>

In general, national government Ministries of Planning and Finance are utilizing such complex instruments to determine future budget expenses to achieve the MDGs in association with other relevant agencies and departments. The MCI's use of the UNDP needs assessment models for the Millennium Cities is the first application of these tools at the municipal level. Some of the models clearly require adaptation, or "localization," to be useful for local governments.<sup>[4]</sup> The MCI is engaging in research and action on a case-by-case basis, with the eventual intention of preparing a full set of models that can be effectively applied in urban regions throughout the developing world. In addition to quantitative models, the MCI is producing complementary qualitative narratives to highlight and expand upon key statistical and analytical insights.

Beyond these formal needs assessments, the MCI has generated a comprehensive, poverty-related household survey designed to study and identify the particular web of factors that entrench urban residents in severe poverty. The research results from this bottom-up, multi-sector demand-side survey, coupled with the cost estimates derived from the UNDP needs assessments of what it will take to fill the gap in each sector on the supply side, will enable the MCI to develop a detailed model of poverty factors unique to each city. This approach will generate a clear understanding of which sectors are farther along toward filling their MDG gaps, and which sectors need added financial support and technical assistance. Where funding and resource capacity permits, the MCI will use GPS mapping to observe not only which sectors need the most help, but also which urban communities within the city and region need the most help.

The MCI will communicate these findings through a series of consultative workshops convened together with municipal governments, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and many other vital stakeholder groups. It is critically important that all associations and individuals wishing to be represented at these workshops are included, and that everyone's views are respectfully presented and heard during such meetings. In order to reach large numbers of stakeholders, workshops may be held in multiple neighborhoods, with translators, childcare, and other necessary services provided, along with extra sessions scheduled as needed. Simple and understandable summary versions of the research findings are prepared for these workshops. Such graphic, low-technology audio-visual presentations of the Millennium City's MDG agenda by sector and place are designed to empower participating stakeholders with the facts that can enable them to agree upon and carry out well-informed decisions.<sup>[5]</sup>

MCI's investment analysis and recommendations will be presented with the other research findings, to be factored into constituents' decision-making. Overlaps – areas where severe need and/or opportunity might be highlighted in more than one sector – can help provide both the strategy and rationale for encouraging major infusions of investment capital and/or development financing. A GPS map of the Bamako riverfront, for instance, or of Kisumu's

access to Lake Victoria, might revealing genuine potential for tourism, but at the same time may point out important problems to be addressed such as increased childhood morbidity due to water-bred diseases, significant environmental contamination, and periodic flooding. These problems, which also constitute major barriers to private investment, clearly must be solved, both to advance the city's public health agenda and to enable the productive use of rivers or lakes in economic development initiatives promoting market-based tourism.

When local leaders and stakeholders have agreed to a set of ranked priorities, a consultative group, working with technical support from the MCI, will draft the City Development Strategy to focus on the consensus of priority actions, including investment objectives for the city as a whole. Once approved by key stakeholders, each completed City Development Strategy will then need be converted into a specific comprehensive plan, complete with budgets and timetables, and will require the financial and policy support of governments, donors, private investors, and other development partners in order to succeed.

The next steps to implement the City Development Strategy involve documentation, advocacy, and investment promotion at the regional, national and international levels. Individual partners will be enlisted to invest in and assist different sectors and places. Capacity-building workshops will be a vital element of the ongoing implementation, so that the city can move the strategy forward to its complete fulfillment. Continuous feedback concerning both the process and outputs will be critical in helping the MCI become more inclusive and responsive in each local context, thus improving the overall economic methodology as it is increasingly replicated and scaled-up globally. Such valuable critiques also will be incorporated into the MCI Handbook, hopefully resulting in an effective guide for other cities and urban regions eager to achieve the MDGs while generating dynamic and environmentally sustainable economic growth.

In sum, the Millennium Cities Initiative has engaged in a comprehensive approach to achieving the Millennium Development Goals in urban regions because cities' and donors' best-intentioned attempts to accomplish the MDGs individually and incrementally have not been working well enough to succeed. Despite donors' understandable interest in addressing one problem at a time, the fact is that all significant economic, social, and environmental development is inextricably interconnected, meaning that partial success in some aspects of the MDGs remains quite vulnerable to the other "weak links." With mothers still dying from childbirth and their children dying of malaria, the clock is fast running out, and the MCI's comprehensive approach to poverty reduction, public health, and sustainable prosperity offers hope for the world at a time when the need for rapid and long-lasting solutions is extraordinarily urgent.

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<sup>[1]</sup> The Millennium Villages Project is a joint undertaking of the Earth Institute, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the non-profit Millennium Promise, and an increasing number of donor and host governments.

<sup>[2]</sup> E.g., the traditional donor community, development finance institutions, international agencies and the growing pool of interested international investors, including such newly engaged actors as China and other Asian powers, South Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.

<sup>[3]</sup> <http://www.undp.org/poverty/mdgsupport.htm>.

<sup>[4]</sup> This is particularly true for the infrastructure sectors (e.g., transport, energy, ICT), but can also hold for public health, where, for instance, information regarding the costs of HIV/AIDS or malaria interventions in a given city, the administration of which might come through of the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria, might not be known to municipal health officers.

<sup>[5]</sup> However, the finished complement of needs assessment analyses will be available to anyone interested. The most elegant representations of such findings are the so-called development diamonds championed by Sumila

Gulyani and others. See, for example, diagrammatic representations in, "Affordable Energy Provision for Water and Sanitation Services in Developing Country Cities" (04/03/07, Gulyani, S. and Talukdar, D. 2006, UN Habitat Presentation); "Slum Real Estate: The low-quality high price puzzle in Nairobi's slum rental market and its implications for theory," Washington DC: World Bank, Urban Symposium. May 2007  
<http://www.worldbank.org/urban/symposium2007/papers/gulyani.pdf>; and Gulyani, S. (2006), "Kenya inside informality: Poverty, jobs, housing and services in Nairobi's slums." Report no. 36347-ke, World Bank, Water and Urban Unit.