



**Fifteenth Commission on Sustainable Development
High-Level Segment**

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Address by

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Mr. Chairman, Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured and privileged to address this high-level segment of the Commission on Sustainable Development. This 15th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development is coming at a critical juncture in human history. As of this year half of humanity, or 3 billion people, now live in urban areas. Not only is this demographic shift irreversible, it is accelerating.

As we all know, access to affordable, modern energy services is a pre-requisite for sustainable development and poverty alleviation, and, more specifically, for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Lack of access to reliable, safe and environment-friendly energy is a strong constraint on human development. And yet, we note that the energy needs of the urban poor have not received the same attention as is being given to their rural counterparts. It is widely assumed that because the urban poor reside in cities - close to the electricity grid and other modern energy sources like LPG - that they have no energy needs or challenges! Nothing could be further from the truth.

Our recent studies have shown that proximity does not translate into accessibility by the urban poor and that slum dwellers are particularly hard hit by lack of access to modern energy. They pay more for their cooking fuel, water and sanitation than wealthier people connected to the service networks. They pay a heavy penalty in terms of poor health and loss in productivity. They pay this penalty because they are poor. In essence, lack of access to modern energy is a major contributing factor to the vicious cycle of poverty in urban areas and a major impediment to the attainment of the MDGs.

Excellencies,

It is no coincidence that global climate change has become a leading international development issue precisely at the same time the world has become predominantly urban. This is because how we plan, manage, operate and consume energy in our cities is the key driver behind all forms of emissions. 75% of global energy consumption occurs in cities. 80% of greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming come from cities. Roughly half of this amount comes from burning fossil fuels for urban transport; the other half comes from energy use in buildings and to fuel our industries and appliances. These are the hallmarks of our built environment and our urban way of life. Indeed, climate change and urbanization are virtually inseparable. It is therefore crucial to recognize that cities and their residents are not just seen as victims of climate change, for example in terms of rising sea levels, but as part of the problem. And if cities are part of the problem, they must inevitably be part of the solution. While cities and local authorities must “adapt” to the impacts of climate change, they remain in the driver’s seat in terms of any sustainable effort in mitigation.

Distinguished delegates,

Let me take a few minutes to describe UN-HABITAT’s work in the area of energy for sustainable development and combating Climate Change.

Energy Generation for Water and Sanitation Services Provision

As you are aware, UN-HABITAT established a Water and Sanitation Trust Fund as a follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg to help attain the water and sanitation target of the MDGs. Within this framework we are implementing two special initiatives, the Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation Initiative in Africa and the Mekong Delta Water and Sanitation Initiative in Asia, to assist local authorities in the provision of pro-poor water and sanitation in secondary towns. In order to avail these basic services in an affordable and reliable manner, focus is being put on the use of locally available sources of energy. The use of alternative clean energy reduces the cost of electricity for pumping water, thus making it more affordable for the poor. In Kisii, a Kenya town around the Lake Victoria, UN-HABITAT is designing a small hydropower plant of 200 KW that will provide electricity to pump water to the town. In Homa Bay, another Kenyan town on the shore of the Lake, UN-HABITAT is designing biogas plants to use the abundant organic waste from the fish industry and the vegetable market to produce methane and generate electricity. The electricity again will be used to pump water to the town. The payback period of both interventions should not exceed 5 years. In summary, energy and water and poverty reduction are linked, and it is through concerted approaches which target the poor where we can make great strides and real impact on attaining the MDGs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Energy and transport considerations in slum-upgrading

Kibera, located in Nairobi has become in many ways a household name, especially since our Secretary General visited this sprawling slum a few months ago. The problem that affects many slums is their illegal status which prevents their inhabitants from gaining access to public services. For this reason, their inhabitants resort to the use of charcoal and kerosene. The use of one contributes to deforestation. The use of the other constitutes a major source of in-door pollution, ill-health and fire hazards. I am pleased to inform you that UN-HABITAT, in collaboration with the Kenya Power and Lighting Company, is developing a slum electrification programme for Kibera. The power utility has realized that by ignoring the existence of the slum dwellers as potential customers, it is not only losing business, it also incurs losses due to illegal connections and unregulated use that damage transformers and increase maintenance costs. This initiative is a win-win situation as slum dwellers will actually pay less for energy and improve their health and safety by being connected to the grid.

Promoting Bus-Rapid Transit (and complementary non-motorized transportation measures) as a cost-effective transport solution to reduce Green-house gas emissions

UN-HABITAT is providing technical assistant to the Government of Kenya to design a Bus-Rapid Transit system and the complementary non-motorized transportation infrastructure in Nairobi. In addition, UN-HABITAT is addressing the mobility problems of poor people living in Kibera, through the implementation of a non-motorized transport programme that aims at providing a sustainable and flexible solution to accessibility and generating income-earning opportunities.

UN-Habitat is promoting the use of Bus-Rapid Transit as an appropriate urban transport technology for developing countries. As a high-capacity, high-volume public transport system constructed at a tenth of the cost of conventional light and heavy rail systems, Bus-Rapid Transit is an appropriate public transport response to exponential increases in both congestion and air pollution for rapidly growing cities.

Climate change

As I mentioned earlier, over 80% of the global greenhouse gas emission originate from cities. Most of the largest cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America are port cities, and thus directly subject to the impacts of a rising sea level. Cities built next to rivers or on reclaimed lands in riverbed planes will be prone to additional inundation. This will increase the morbidity and mortality rates, and malaria is likely to occur in greater areas due to flooding, temperature rise and a wide habitat range for mosquitoes.

In this connection, UN-HABITAT is establishing together with our sister agency UNEP a special unit on climate change to mainstream mitigation and adaptation measures into all our respective programmes and activities. The unit will also develop norms and provide technical advisory in the design of zero emission housing and energy efficiency measures to be applied on existing buildings.

In our Medium-term Strategic and Institutional Plan for 2008-2013, we clearly place our work in the field of climate change at centre stage. Under its Focus Area 3, one indicator of success is an agreed number of countries adopting pro-poor housing, land and property delivery systems for the urban poor and populations affected by crises including climate change threats. This implies that cities must have a voice in the climate change debate! Cities must be involved in the crucial climate change negotiations! And cities must implement the policy changes at the local level! We shall work very closely with UNEP on this global agenda to build local capacity for local action. Under the Medium-term Plan we shall seek to prevent cities becoming disaster traps for millions of people.

Mr. Chairman,

We all agree that energy is crucial for sustainable development. However, I call upon you to give special attention to the one third of the world's urban population that lack access to modern energy. The urban poor are estimated at one billion people worldwide today. This figure is likely to double within the next 25 years. Widespread slum electrification, using both conventional and decentralized clean energy systems is a concrete step towards fighting poverty, which is increasingly an urban phenomenon. We can no longer ignore the energy needs of the urban poor in our global debate and action plans. We do so at the risk of massive deforestation, poor health and environmental deterioration.

I thank you for your kind attention.