

Civil Society statement to Africities 9 Summit

Social justice and African cities

Civil society groups convened at the Civil Society Forum for the Africities 9, Kisumu, 15th and 16th May 2022, discussed the issue of Social Justice, pertaining to the theme of the Summit, “The role of intermediary cities of Africa in the implementation of the United Nations Agenda 2030 and the African Union Agenda 2063.”

The Forum addressed three key questions. They are as follows:

What is the mention of social justice, direct or indirect, in the UN Agenda 2030 and the AU Agenda 2063, including the Concept Note of Africities 9?

What is the existing situation of social justice in the African cities?

What are the courses of action aimed at changing the existing situation into the desired one?

Mention of issue

The UN Agenda 2030 and the AU agenda 2063, including the Concept note of Africities 9, mention social justice indirectly as follows:

The UN Agenda 2030 alludes to social justice in SDG 10: “Reduce inequality within and among countries.” (Reducing inequalities and ensuring no one is left behind are integral to the achieving the Sustainable Development Goals); and in SDG 16: “Promote peaceful inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

(It is an engine for progress and an enabling tool for all other Goals).

Social justice was frequently referred to in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 (Social Justice in an Open World: The Role of United Nations. UN, New York, 2006).

Aspiration 3 of the AU Agenda 2063 states “An Africa of Good Governance, Democracy, Respect for Human Rights, Justice and the Rule of Law. “It implies social justice.

The Africities 9 Concept note 2020 hints at social justice in paragraph 4, “The 2020 economic outlook, drawn up by the Economic Commission for Africa, shows interesting growth (at 3.4%), even if it is lower than the ten-year average growth. However, the strong inequalities noted reveal an economic growth whose inclusiveness can largely be improved upon.” And further in paragraph 7 “Intermediary cities can easily entrench the culture of good governance, democratic practices, gender equality, respect for human rights, justice and the maintenance of the rule of law.”

Existing situation

The impoverished in African cities are women, men and children left behind by urban development. They are deprived not only of wealth (income and assets), but also of wellbeing (health and safe environment), knowledge (education and information), skill (competence for decent work) and power (voice and agency). Having many impoverished side-by-side with a few who are better-off in African cities cannot be the way forward. The existing situation of unjust disadvantage must change.

Courses of action

The civil society expectation of Africities 9 is that the UCLG Africa addresses social justice directly as a demand rather than indirectly. The umbrella body needs to devise a Social Justice Framework, to guide the governments of African cities to develop and implement their respective Social Justice Action Plans. The cities are duty-bound to reduce inequalities and inequities, and to ensure the worse-off become better-off—a human rights obligation of city governments as well as African states. People expect the Africities 9 Summit to come up with a vision of the African Just City and the way to realise it.