

# Building the New Urban Agenda for Intermediary Cities



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# The power of intermediary cities

The urbanization process does not only effect big cities but also, and even more so, intermediary cities. According to the United Nations, cities of under 1 million inhabitants constitute more than 60% of the global urban population and are growing faster than larger urban centres. Cities are increasing their role, replacing states as business, investment and economic governance mechanisms. As a result, a new order or system of cities is emerging that is not based on physical size. The new system, which is rather based on the economic action and cooperation of cities through networks, creates new and dynamic working methods in the urban world.

Cities that are identified as intermediary or secondary, have now become a renewed subject of interest for academics and international development organizations. This is due to the connections that they make between rural areas – the hinterland – and urban zones by playing an active mediator role between surrounding territories, at least between agricultural and urban nuclei. Their mediator role allows them to provide basic services to the urban and rural population, reaching a bigger share of the population, and making it possible to stimulate sustainable urban growth, which in turn offers opportunities to the entire

region. In view of this, they are identified as key elements for a balanced urbanization process.

We believe that the international community should offer greater space and support to intermediary cities than what has been given up to this date. The needs and challenges of local governments should be of key importance for international associations. UN Habitat and UCLG must support the capacities of many intermediary cities through national and regional indicators and through applicable experience exchanges. We believe that by supporting intermediary cities so that they find their own urban growth path, we are ensuring diverse and fairer urban development.

The UCLG agenda for intermediary cities is an opportunity to share ideas with Mayors and academics that have been working to build the agenda on the findings of the CIMES network for over a decade. Events like the Lleida Forum have been important steps in the journey to give force to intermediary cities; proof of this aim is the active work of local and regional governments in this field: exchanging and innovating urban governance. We hope that this will be the beginning of wider cooperation that will stimulate more balanced and fair future development.



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# Intermediary Cities

## as the key to achieving sustainable urban development

Intermediary cities face unique challenges and opportunities. Given the flow of opportunities to develop new forms of rural-urban alliances, new growth patterns and land use, new modes of transport and new economic relations, United Cities and Local Governments has incorporated Intermediary Cities into its agenda with the aim of building the agenda of local and regional governments towards sustainable urban development.

UCLG is supported in this task by networks such as CIMES and the Union of Architects, as well as international institutions that have joined the effort, in particular UN-Habitat, the International Labour Organization (ILO), Cities Alliance and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Member cities of the Urban Strategic Planning Committee and initiatives such as the “Global Fund for Cities Development” and the Andalusian Municipal Fund for International Solidarity (FAMSI), are also contributing to the compilation of information. These cities are analysing and following up on processes in order to foster greater understanding of the work being conducted by city leaders and to work towards the drafting of recommendations within the World Organization of UCLG.

Within the framework of this objective and

based on the initial vision from Europe and Latin America on the work of Intermediary Cities, UCLG has shared analysis on the realities and current situations of intermediary cities in Africa in the frame document ([http://issuu.com/uclgclg/docs/es\\_frame\\_document\\_i\\_cities\\_uclg\\_ilo](http://issuu.com/uclgclg/docs/es_frame_document_i_cities_uclg_ilo)). Various global examples have been accompanied by learning events between Southern cities.

With the support of this work, various conclusions have been reached, among which, the idea that the construction of new and innovative forms of urban-rural alliance, and governance and leadership, should be a priority theme in planning the future agendas of intermediary cities. Rural territories cannot be reduced to “serve” as an asset for urban growth, for they would disappear and important resources would be lost, such as land, water, oxygen or food.

Strategic urban planning and financial instruments should be used to guide sustainable development taking into account these cities’ particular conditions. To get there, new indicators that consider these differences are needed. In order to revise planning and financing mechanisms of national government that usually define priorities based on population or



economic indicators, it is important to measure environmental opportunities and services (of land and agriculture).

With regards to climate change, intermediary cities have an important role to play in adaptation, especially in reducing the effects of climate change and their risks for the regions and big cities. For this, intermediary cities require adequate technical knowledge and financial means.

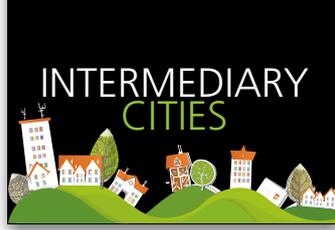
The role of local, social and economic development is a key factor that should be strengthened through planning adapted to the reality of a territory, in particular, the application

of economies of proximity, which are beneficial for socio-economic conditions of intermediary cities.

At UCLG, we want to provide an incentive, using our network, animating the international community, the networks and international municipal movement associations, to collaborate in this task and facilitate solutions and exchange experiences that allow us to reinforce current knowledge accessible to intermediary cities. Achieving this means long-term benefits for the global urbanization process and the impact on intermediary cities will be strategic urban planning and diverse and sustainable urban development.

**OVER 60% OF THE GLOBAL URBAN POPULATION IS LIVING IN CITIES OF LESS THAN 1 MILLION INHABITANTS AND THIS TREND IS SET TO GROW OVER THE COMING DECADES ACCORDING TO THE UNITED NATIONS**





# The Visibility challenge

*Intermediary cities are calling for a greater role in the 21st century owing to their demographic importance and the vital functions that perform within a territory. These urban centres have greater potential to achieve sustainability than metropolises. Still pending, however, is recognition at national and international levels of the unique profile and needs of intermediary cities.*

Today, few would question that the future of the Earth is urban. The United Nations estimates that by 2050, of the 9 billion inhabitants of the planet, 6 billion will reside in cities. Nevertheless, this global data does not give information on how the population will be distributed within territories. The general assumption is that metropolises will host the majority of inhabitants, but this is not the case. The media attention that Tokyo, Sao Paulo and Shanghai receive and the emphasis on the collective imagination hide an unquestionable piece of data: over 60% of the urban population live in cities of less than 1 million inhabitants. Furthermore, according to the United Nations, this is a trend that will grow in the coming decades.

## **Demography and more**

Although relevant, the demographic weight of intermediary cities is not the only reason behind their importance - the fundamental basis of their importance is in the roles they play. Experts underline that these urban centres

are 'intermediaries' between different levels, facilitating the flow of information, goods, services and dynamic economic activity between big cities and the rural world. A system of intermediary cities makes the activity of a country less concentrated and results in the creation of reference points at regional level. An interesting example is the Leipzig charter (2007) on sustainable cities of the European Union that refers to city systems and a territorial dynamic composed of cities collaborating with each other. This is a challenge for the traditional order of cities based on population size: the national economy can benefit from a network of smaller cities that work in economic clusters, not necessarily driven by metro or capital cities.

Beyond the territorial balance, there are also other characteristics of intermediary cities that are of interest today: their reduced dimension facilities governance and citizen participation, especially in the field of urban planning, through which identification with the community is reinforced.

In some cases, the identification with



## OVER HALF OF INTERMEDIARY CITIES -SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS SECONDARY CITIES - ARE LOCATED IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

the community is enhanced and opens up opportunities to learn from megacities and ensures a more concerted development. In addition, their ecological footprint is smaller than that of the great metropolis. For the aforementioned reasons, intermediary cities can favour sustainable development and have captured the attention of the academic world, UCLG, the United Nations, and other international organizations.

The North-South division is an important variable: in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the need for basic infrastructure generates a series of problems to varying degrees of urgency and resolution depending on the country; in Europe, the urgent challenges are encapsulated in how to face the crisis from urban centres where the economy is less diverse than in big cities. Over half of intermediary cities - sometimes known as secondary cities - are situated in developing nations. Other issues highlighted during the Forum, include the lack of information and data on economic, infrastructure and citizen governance. According to Cities Alliance, a global partnership for urban poverty reduction strengthening the role of cities in sustainable development, the lack of socio-economic data about rapidly expanding cities severely impedes the capacity of intermediary cities to plan their social and economic future.

### Shared problems

The debate among the invited mayors during the international forum in Lleida also highlighted that, beyond each specific situation,

intermediary cities can cooperate to address shared issues such as: financial difficulties, capacities related to taking their own decisions at local level (relations with superior bodies and administrations), and the need for good urban strategic planning with follow up on implementations. Invited local governments raised the issue of their willingness to build a shared agenda that could contribute to “visibility and international recognition”. UCLG committed to support this united call and offered the tools and infrastructure necessary to continue developing the collaboration between intermediary cities, stimulating the creation of knowledge and partnerships.

This proposal is also backed by the United Nations Programme for Human Settlements (UN-HABITAT). Their representative, Laura Petrella, expressed during the Forum, that the perspective of intermediary cities should be incorporated into the urban discussion to further enrich the debate. Other organizations that were invited to the meeting in Lleida (the International Labour Organization, Cities Alliance and the World Forum for the Development of Cities, FMDV) further supported and reinforced this message.

### Pending recognition

The forum in Lleida allowed for the drafting of a frame document that reflects the united position on the needs and challenges of intermediary cities in four areas; territorial planning, environment, social dialogue and cultural identity. The document was presented last October during the fourth World Congress



of UCLG in Rabat (Morocco) and was opened to contributions from members in the form of observations and proposals up to December. The strategic future of UCLG in relation to intermediary cities involves situating them as a group in their own right with their own profile so they can be addressed during the forthcoming major international debate forums. Among these events, it should be highlighted that the global agenda for sustainable development will be decided with around nine steps that, as of 2015, will substitute the Millennium Development Goals. Additionally, the Habitat III process, the third conference of the United Nations on Housing and Urban Sustainable Development, will take place in 2016, and should be considered. During this event, cities, governments, representatives from civil society and the private sector, educational institutions and others stakeholders will come together with the objective of revising urban and housing policies that affect the future of cities. It is hoped that this meeting will result in a new urban agenda and that, during these steps, recognition of the real importance of intermediate cities will be achieved.

### **The major challenges**

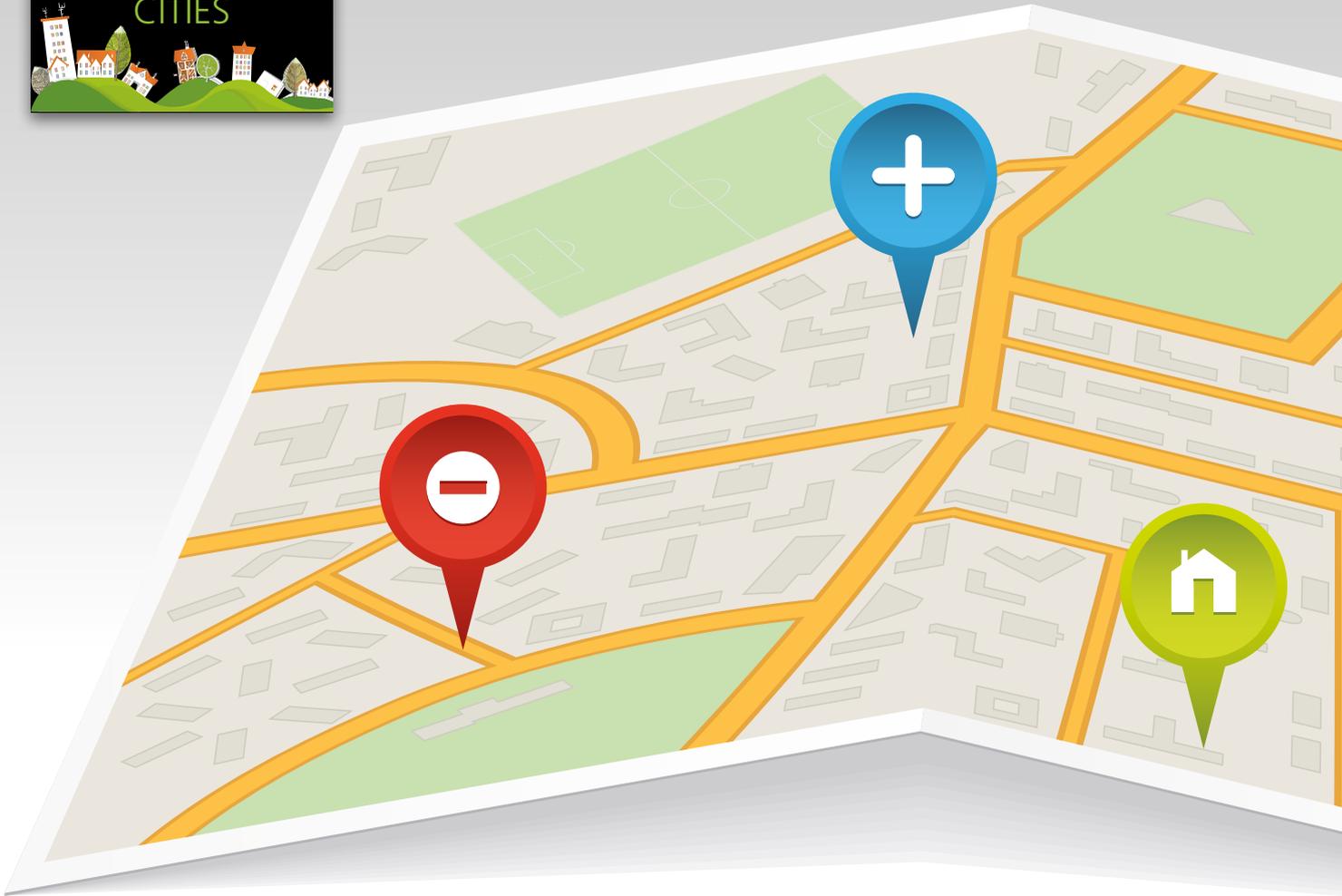
In parallel to international recognition, intermediary cities should also have access to their own resources to best prepare for the future. Cities Alliance has identified some of the key challenges that must be addressed and that can also be seen as opportunities. One of these challenges is globalization.

The new economy and the increase in global commerce favours big cities. Nevertheless, given to the importance of logistics and distribution in the local and regional markets, intermediary cities can be advantageous owing to their position. An alternative to this would involve promoting endogenous economic growth without the exterior interdependence while emphasizing the aggregated value of the rural and local resources. This objective is however more difficult in the cases of low-income countries.

In relation to the previous point, the deficit in governance is today one of the major obstacles for economic and social development. According to Cities Alliance, many national and local governments do not fully realise the importance of reducing the bureaucratic hurdles to increase competitiveness in urban centres when creating and managing companies. This prevents intermediary cities from overcoming one of the persistent problems, namely insufficient dynamic economic activity.

Consequently, in many countries the distance in income per capita between big cities and secondary cities is increasing, for example in Brazil the difference is 35%. This pattern is repeated in various parts of the world and is especially significant in Asia. The fact that, as indicated previously, intermediary cities are growing in number and in total population, makes it necessary to give them more attention given that, based on the urban realities they represent, they hold the key to a substantial part of humanity.

**THE DIMENSION OF INTERMEDIARY CITIES FACILITATES GOVERNANCE AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION, ESPECIALLY IN THE FIELD OF URBAN PLANNING**



# Intermediary Cities in the new urban agenda

*Today, it would be impossible to conduct an in-depth analysis of the urban phenomenon without taking into account the role of intermediary cities, defined here as cities with less than 1 million inhabitants. In reality, these cities, at both local and regional level, account for over 50% of the global urban population.*

Intermediary cities are large cities that create bridges to connect important rural and urban areas, and represent, for the rural population, an opportunity to access basic facilities (like schools, hospitals, administrative processes, and markets), to use the markets for selling the products, and to access to services (such as employment, IT services, transport). By having this intermediate

position, they are also a transition point to exit rural poverty for the majority of citizens. Furthermore, particularly in developed countries owing to the relations created with metropolises, they are able to compliment other cities and run as a system of cities. Despite having a fundamental role in the global urbanization process, intermediary cities have



previously been removed from the experience based knowledge exchange related to strategic planning. In view of this, they will require greater attention in the coming years, given that local governments must prepare for rapid urban growth and the major challenges that will be faced in the future, namely: political and financial dependence, limited capacity and scarce financial resources.

### **UCLG and intermediary cities**

Governments, especially local and regional governments, should come together to address the shortcomings and needs in urban planning through a greater understanding of the challenges and the perspectives of local governments. The international institutions, including UN-Habitat, the International Labour Organization, the OECD, the World Bank and Cities Alliance, are increasingly recognizing the importance of medium and small cities in the urbanization process and in regional sustainable development. Guy Ryder, General Director of the International Labour Organization (ILB), believes

that, “we cannot underestimate the value of intermediary cities. Their role is crucial for the promotion of decent work and to constructively change work markets: stimulating the economy based on cultural and territorial values, serving as a bridge overcoming geographical distances, facilitating the creation of employment and social dialogue at local level. Innovative actions are being taken and we must listen to local political leaders and actors from the world of labour, employers, employees and communities that have many sustainable initiatives”. Since early 2013, UCLG, with the Urban Strategic Planning Committee, its members, associations and regions, including also the support of Cities Alliance, the Norwegian government and the European Commission and other UCLG committees, has been consulting local leaders through city-to-city cooperation and workshops on the role and the challenges for intermediary cities. The work being conducted consists in seeking knowledge on intermediary cities in order to learn and plan urban sustainable development, responding to the requests of the urban and rural

**THE FUTURE STRATEGY OF UCLG FOR INTERMEDIARY CITIES WILL AIM TO SITUATE THEM AS A GROUP WITH ITS OWN PROFILE IN ORDER TO CAPTIVATE THE ATTENTION OF THE FORTHCOMING INTERNATIONAL DEBATE FORUMS**



THE NORTH-SOUTH DEVISION IS AN IMPORTANT VARIABLE: IN AFRICA, ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA THE NEED FOR BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE GENERATES A SERIES OF ISSUES WITH VARYING DEGREES OF URGENCY AND RESOLUTION ACCORDING TO THE COUNTRY

populations of the region. From UCLG, we have seen that intermediary cities must have their own voice in the urbanization debate.

**The New Urban Agenda**

Planning is a key topic in the agenda of local and regional governments, through this, UCLG incorporated intermediary cities in its agenda in 2013. Based on the work developed by the Strategic Urban Planning committee, UCLG underlines the importance of the connection between the urban and rural, from public interest in land, the key role of public space and the need to guarantee the spatial proximity and the inter-municipal cooperation.

All these recommendations have been brought together in one “frame document” drawn up by UCLG on the basis of contributions of more than 40 researchers and professionals. The “frame document”, debated by UCLG members, brings together political recommendations on planning and financing the sustainable development of intermediary cities.

The directives of the frame document will be key in the New Urban Agenda that will be defined during Habitat III in 2016. This is one of the pillars with which UCLG emphasises the need to give an increased role to local governments in

the new global development agenda.

These lines will be used to contribute to the definition of the International Guidelines on Urban Strategic Planning that will be defined by UCLG and its members. These directives should promote greater recognition before the United Nations, OECD and the World Bank, and will help conduct investigative work on these cities at global and European level and eventually establish cooperation between them.

The next appointment on the global calendar will be the World Urban Forum that will take place in Medellín, Colombia in April 2014. On this occasion, UCLG will open spaces to evaluate the planning tools and link new forms of cooperation for intermediary cities, in particular to promote South-South cooperation.

The work and knowledge stemming from the study and cooperation of contributing cities to the strategic spatial planning and financing can be used to guide sustainable development to better adapt to the unique conditions of cities for the future. The future urban agenda could, therefore, allow for sustainable, inclusive and diverse cities and environments.

In view of this, we call upon the international community, networks and partners, to exchange knowledge and solutions based on evidence between global intermediary cities.

# Cooperation with Intermediary cities in Africa

Over the last few years, African cities have experienced rapid urban growth, and intermediary cities, despite occupying a secondary position in the national urban system, represent a central hope for many citizens from the rural surroundings. Their growth denotes an increase, not only in wealth but, also in inequalities, hereby representing a challenge for local governments. Cities like Blantyre (Malawi) and Nampula (Mozambique), but also Kwadukuzana (South Africa) and Swakopmund (Namibia) are recognized as intermediary cities having been studied by the UCLG Committee

on Urban Strategic Planning. The two cities Blantyre and Nampula are territorial poles in their countries, positioned in the “Nacala-Tete” corridor that provides the biggest mines in Africa. Thanks to the UCLG committee and the work of UCLG City Future with Cities Alliance, and the German cooperation GIZ, both cities have currently launched cross-border South-South cooperation projects. Blantyre and Nampula are seeking to initiate cooperation within this corridor despite the restrictive economic policies on cross-border activity of their respective countries.



## MALAWI Blantyre

Blantyre is one of the four cities declared as an urban zone in Malawi. The outer limit of Blantyre was defined in 1949 and revised in 1956 to get to a zone

that covers 228 Km<sup>2</sup> today. 60% of the population resides in informal housing. Consequently, numerous communities are currently being established on the outer limit of the city and enter the inner city during the day to access services that can only be found there, such as markets, employment and social services. In light

of this, during the day, the city nearly doubles in population to reach 1 million. The congestion in central zones makes planning and servicing difficult. The current administration limits of Blantyre show the complexity of addressing the urbanization process in intermediary cities.



## MOZAMBIQUE Nampula

With a size similar to Blantyre (700,000 inhabitants), Nampula presents an intense comparison though spatial development that has been experienced in this city. While Blantyre presents spatial pockets of poverty, Nampula’s poverty can be

found in three circular levels which create a process of impoverishment from the centre to the outskirts. Nampula perfectly illustrates with its three rings of the population, the different phases of growth and development of a city. The first ring covers the historic centre of the former Portuguese colony while the second was built through violence during the years of war in the 80’s, which

meant that the population took refuge in a tight and disorderly manner around the former Portuguese city. Finally, the third ring was created as the republic and the decentralized system were established, while the municipality acquired the power to provide land and licences to the population. New buildings with planning were only partially created and not all new areas have basic services and transport.

## Cooperation with Intermediary cities in Africa

Another partnership between the Namibian city of Swakopmund and the South African city of Kwadukuza emerged during a Learning Exchange session held in March 2013. The experience presented by Swakopmund appeared very relevant for South African Intermediate Cities. And thanks to the support of the German Development Cooperation (GIZ), Cities Alliance and the

Government of Norway, the cities came together in Swakopmund in February 2014, to share their experiences regarding service provision, strategic planning and employment. Both sessions were supported methodologically by the associations UCLG, ALAN and the eThekweni Municipal Institute of Learning.



### NAMIBIA Swakopmund

The city is located in the desert on the west coast of Namibia. With 60,000 inhabitants, it is the third biggest city in the country. The focus and strategy of the Municipality is to provide sustainable services. Known for its “free from debt” municipal budget, the Municipality offers

water provision and electricity, sanitation, roads and infrastructure to communities. The city is undergoing enormous growth as it attracts low income populations looking for jobs related to the active mines in the interior of the country. In the city-to-city Learning Exchange event with KwaDukuza, the effective management of both cities was highlighted. Other points as the clear employment policies, the role of politicians and the relation between rights

and obligations within the community were emphasized as well. In Swakopmund, all citizens pay for water and for the cleaning of the streets but receive a high quality service. Citizens with higher incomes and those who consume more, pay higher rates. Nevertheless, the increase in poverty levels continues to be a problem and the ways to subsidize the needs of the poorest population should be explored.



### SOUTH AFRICA Kwadukuza

Situated on the Southern coast of the country near eThekweni, Kwadukuza is a metropolis influencing its surroundings. The city accommodates 170,000 people and shows severe contrasts within its population: a part of it originally comes

from the sugar industry which is still the main product of the interior lands, while other parts of the population lack of income and seek work during the vacation period. The territory of Kwadukuza is vast - 700km<sup>2</sup> - and contains numerous settlements demonstrating the segregation of white, black and racial indigenous populations. All these groups are distanced from each

other and disconnected from the public transportation network. Therefore, one of the main challenges of the municipality consists in a better distribution of its services. Conversely, the employment policies in Swakopmund were identified as an example to follow in order to overcome a current gap and find solutions.

## Join the agenda:

**1** The event in the World Urban Forum, **9th April** from 12.00 - 13.00 “Planning for sustainable intermediary cities” in the Yellow Pavilion, Room 2.  
Presentation of the frame document on intermediary cities.  
Debate and conclusions on intermediary cities in the Habitat III global agenda.

**2** Networking event at the World Urban Forum, **9th April** from 16:30 - 18:30 on the South-South Cooperation project in Intermediary cities in Brazil and Mozambique, co-organized with Architects without Borders (ASF), Frente Nacional de Prefeitos (FNP) and the National Association of Mozambican Municipalities (ANAMM).

**3** We also recommend:  
**7th April** 13:30-14:30 Cities for live Iberoamerican network CIDEU City changer room.  
**8th April** 14:00 – 16:00 Secondary Cities and Sustainable City Systems Cities Alliance, Yellow Pavilion.  
**8th April** 8:30-9:30 am. UN Habitat Book launch of Urban Planning for City Leaders (Spanish).

**4** Tanger (Morocco) **24th April:** Roundtable discussion during the Medinas network cities Congress, International Forum of the Médinas, FIM.

**5** TECMA Fair Madrid IFEMA **12th June:** Roundtable on Intermediary Cities.

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- More information and publications: [www.uclg.org](http://www.uclg.org)



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