Meet the Sustainable City Challenge

Today, and for the first time in history, more than half the world’s population lives in cities. More than two-thirds of urban dwellers—2.5 billion people—live in developing countries. The situation obviously varies greatly from one continent to the next. Behind these differences, four major facts are shared by the processes underway:

- **The spreading and worsening of poverty and exclusion.** One quarter of the world’s urban population lives in slums and this number is constantly growing. Cities are increasingly divided between under-equipped settlements and residential neighborhoods. The social, economic and political fractures and the spatial fractures mutually reinforce each other.

- **The globalization of the economy and the globalization of information networks generate growing inequalities between large and small cities.** The first are better equipped, more attractive, and better integrated in global dynamics and networks.

- **The increasing importance of environmental issues** manifests itself both global (climate change and its consequences in terms of natural disasters) and local (insufficient sanitation and the consequences on health) forms. Precarious settlements are the most vulnerable. How can one move forward when resources are in short supply?

- **The re-composition of systems of actors that produce and manage cities** around three main types of actors: public institutions, inhabitants/users/citizens, and the private sector. The associative movement and decentralized local governments have progressively become central to local dynamics.

Added to this is a growing inter-penetration of rural and urban worlds via rural exodus, temporary migrations, the media, trade, decentralization, urban growth, etc. These dynamics should be better known and considered when taking action on both urban and rural levels.

Fighting poverty and inequalities, developing territories in a balanced manner, new methods of governance and urban management, and respect for the environment make up the elements of sustainable urban development. They form the framework of reference for urban action in developing countries.
Our Position: 
**Fight Urban Relegation and Ensure a Right to the City for All**

GRET axes its work around a central theme: promote access to urban services and the city’s resources for everyone.

The pressure of the market or public development operations combined with the inadequacy of social housing policies generate a general movement relegating poor populations to the most disadvantaged areas of the city or areas far from the city. At best, re-housing operations provide for basic developments and infrastructures, simple housing or minimal compensation for households. These measures never compensate for the loss of a central location that facilitates access to services and equipment, jobs, and social networks. The households and groups concerned are poorly armed to defend their interests.

GRET works to ensure that these populations have lasting access to resources (both land and economic resources), social and economic services (education, health, administrative services, cultural services, commercial infrastructures), urban services (water, sanitation, energy, transportation), housing, incomes and jobs, mobility within and proximity to the city, a voice, decisions in regard to programs and public policies, and lasting **security**.

GRET works primarily in **large cities or medium-sized capitals** (in Nouakchott, Port-au-Prince, Brazzaville, Niamey, Havana, Phnom Penh, Vientiane, Rabat, Casablanca, Fortaleza1) or in **secondary cities** (Nouadhibou, Aquin, Saint Louis du Sud, Dolisie, Maradi, Pinar del Rio, Antsirabe2).

With the aim of inscribing them in public policies, it implements or supports projects and programs in the fields of:

- **housing** (land tenure security, access to financing, access to suitable housing products);
- **urban services** (water, sanitation, energy) with particular attention to promoting systems that are sustainable on the social, institutional, financial, and technical levels; and
- **local economic development** (access to training and professional insertion, financial and non-financial services for small economic operators).

**Strengthening local actors** (civil society, expertise and advisory firms, local governments, economic operators) individually or in networks is always a crosscutting component of its sectoral and territorial actions.

Know-How, Professions

- **Technical, Social and Financial Engineering for Urban Projects and Programs**

GRET acts in partnership with civil society actors and local NGOs to support their initiatives with the aim of encouraging their inclusion in public policies.

Its actions combine the elaboration of technical solutions that can be easily mastered by local actors, the design of suitable financing mechanisms, and the construction of institutional systems to manage and regulate the services created. The sustainability of the systems set up is always one of the objectives of its action, and relies on multi-actor arenas of discussion and debate where GRET may play a role of intermediation.

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1 Respectively the capitals of Mauritania, Haiti, Congo, Niger, Cuba, Cambodia, Laos, Morocco and Brazil.
2 Respectively Mauritania, Haiti, Congo, Niger, Cuba and Madagascar.
The Twize program, a social housing program conducted in Nouakchott from 1998 to 2008, consisted of four components: housing improvement support, microcredit, training, and support for community projects. The program allowed 7,000 households to improve their housing and led to the creation of a microfinance institution co-financed by the Mauritanian government.

The “drinking water” program in Port-au-Prince: progressively, fifty precarious settlements in the city and nearly one million inhabitants were provided with water access systems managed by local management committees in partnership with the precarious settlement office created specially by the public company. The experience should today be taken into account in the national water sector reform underway, which should formalize delegation of management to committees.

In Brazzaville, Niamey and Maradi, two urban micro-project programs work to improve living conditions in urban settlements (150 projects implemented in all in the fields of water, sanitation, income-generating activities, and local public infrastructures), strengthen communal and associative contracting authority capacities and forge links between local governments and civil society, in support for territory-based decentralization.

The “Centre d’Appui à l’Insertion des jeunes de Nouakchott – Cap Insertion” project is testing a system to support the insertion of young people from outlying settlements in Nouakchott (placement in companies, training). Building on the experience of the Twize program, it brings together young people and their representatives in settlements, companies and their organizations, vocational training organizations, and the Mauritanian public institutions in charge of these issues.

The FormaVak project, active from 2006 to 2009, aimed to sustainably develop the skills and incomes of craftsmen in the city of Antsirabe, Madagascar, by facilitating their access to training services that fit their needs. More than 2000 people completed internships. A training catalogue in eight commodity chains offering more than 300 courses and involving approximately twenty providers and the institutions in charge of education and cottage industries was produced. The IFAC project (information, training, support, advice) extends some of its activities; it is operated by the Centre d’Information Technico-Economique (CITE), in collaboration with GRET.
GRET also supports the management capabilities of public actors in developing countries (local governments, national or local public operators and companies, ministries, administrations). This concerns the implementation of precarious settlement restructuring operations, the elaboration of suitable tools to help decision-making and community investment programming as well as urban management and the adaptation of national sectoral regulations (water, sanitation, housing, land tenure).

A methodology support was provided to the Nouakchott Urban Development Agency for the land regulation and upgrading of a large precarious settlement, Kebbé d'El Mina.

A support has also been provided to the Al Omrane holding company in Morocco for the implementation of socially-oriented urban management processes in its settlement restructuring operations in the context of the national Cities without Slums program.

The management support project for the urban community and communes of Nouakchott, financed by the Ile-de-France Region, emphasizes the construction of territorial knowledge and decision-making tools, training technical services, and project identification.

GRET produces studies, expertise and assessments for urban cooperation actors so as to fuel public discussion and debate, orient aid policies, improve their effectiveness for the benefit of the inhabitants of poor settlements, and contribute to the construction of inclusive policies.

GRET also publishes experience analyses, impact studies, and technical and methodological books, destined to learn lessons from field actions and disseminate these lessons, provide references for operators and decision-makers, and fuel reflection on urban development.

Finally, it runs or participates in programs that aim to share experience, compare practices, and network innovators.

The study produced for the MAEE on *L’action extérieure des collectivités locales en matière de développement urbain* (local governments’ external actions in the field of urban development), identifies the challenges and added value of decentralized urban development cooperation and helped define the ministry’s position on co-financing of local governments’ actions.

The *Manuel de l’animateur urbain. Les bases du métier*. Following on from the urban micro-project program in Brazzaville, this book, published in GRET’s “Guides Pratiques” collection, provides advice and operational tools when it comes to social engineering for urban projects.

The study on *Les marchés fonciers et immobiliers des quartiers informels de Phnom Penh*, (land and real estate markets in informal settlements of Phnom Penh), published in GRET’s “Etudes et Travaux” collection, sheds light on the dynamics at play in informal settlements of Phnom Penh, and the risks, challenges, progress and contradictions of local and international public action.