

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals across the Rural-Urban Divide

The Millennium Cities Initiative (MCI), founded by Earth Institute Director Jeffrey D. Sachs in 2006, is the Earth Institute's urban counterpart to the Millennium Villages Project. The MCI assists selected mid-sized cities across sub-Saharan Africa in their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Millennium Cities to date are Mekelle, Ethiopia; Kumasi, Ghana; Kisumu, Kenya; Blantyre, Malawi; Bamako and Segou, Mali; Akure and Kaduna, Nigeria; and Louga, Senegal.

In the broader context of helping the Millennium Cities formulate integrated City Development Strategies and facilitate the sustainable delivery of social services, the MCI helps the Cities to create employment, stimulate enterprise development and foster economic growth – especially by attracting FDI – in order to eradicate extreme poverty, the first and most basic MDG. The MCI's strategy comprises two principal components: promoting sustainable investment and building viable social services sectors.



Street market in Bamako, Mali

The sustainable investment component of the MCI rests on three pillars. The first is the research and analysis needed to identify and inform foreign investors about commercially viable investment opportunities and the regulatory framework for investment. The MCI works to pinpoint in particular sectors and concrete investment projects for which the Cities, together with the rural areas of the nearby Millennium Villages, have a comparative advantage in either local, national or international markets. The second investment initiative pillar is the promotion of these investment opportunities through the dissemination of the analyses to potential investors, such as through investors' missions and roundtables, special Millennium Cities Days in strategic locations, and the wide distribution of comprehensive Millennium Cities Investors' Guides, the best tool for putting the Millennium Cities on the investment map. The final pillar of the MCI's sustainable investment work is the building of capacity in the Cities to attract investors and partner with them to bring projects to fruition.

The social sector component of the MCI consists of rigorous, MDG-based needs assessments being conducted in each city to apprise urban stakeholders of the accurate, actual costs of achieving the MDGs in such sectors as public health, education, gender, water and sanitation, and energy and transport. On the basis of the information obtained from these assessments and costings, the MCI is engaged in consultative discussions with government and a wide array of urban constituencies to enable them to determine their own development priorities and to design a development strategy to achieve these goals. Further, the MCI seeks to engage external partners to provide crucial assistance in these vital areas through interventions such as medical trainings and the delivery of equipment and other direct services.

Early achievements in sustainable investment and social sector strengthening

The MCI's investment-related activities have already shown impact in the Millennium Cities. As part of the first investment pillar, the MCI is partnering with consulting firm KPMG who is providing pro-bono support to analyze investment opportunities in several cities. These market analyses cover both the global investment landscape and specific products suggesting particular promise, such as shea butter in Bamako, Mali; cocoa and bamboo bikes in Kumasi, Ghana; and sugar in Kisumu, Kenya. The MCI has also benefited from pro-bono partnerships with a number of law firms to prepare regulatory framework assessments for several Millennium Cities. Two city-specific investment guides, one for Kumasi, Ghana and the other for Kisumu, Kenya, have been prepared thus far.

With respect to the second pillar, the MCI has held well-attended Millennium Cities Investment Days in Kumasi in and Kisumu to provide investors with an overview of the investment climate and investment opportunities in those cities. In September 2008, the MCI hosted its first ever Investment Day North America, with a focus on Kumasi. The event took place in New York and was geared to the expatriate Ghanaian community. A number of promising leads came out of this event. In December 2008, the MCI will host its first ever Millennium Cities Day in London, bringing to the attention of investors commercially viable investment opportunities in Kumasi, Ghana; Blantyre, Malawi; Kisumu, Kenya; and Akure, Nigeria. These events follow an Investment Forum on Shea Butter in Bamako, Mali, focusing on commercially viable investment opportunities in the shea butter value chain.

Finally, with respect to the third investment pillar, the MCI has successfully held a capacity-building workshop for city officials in Kisumu in July 2008 that equipped local officials with skills in investment facilitation and promotion. In addition, the MCI has facilitated the establishment of an office for the National Investment Promotion Agencies of both Kisumu and Kumasi. These offices are intended to attract investors to the cities, identify investment opportunities, disseminate information on opportunities and assist potential investors in exploring these opportunities first-hand, furthering decentralization agendas by making it far easier for investors to visit these sites directly.

With regard to its social sector component, the MCI has successfully completed comprehensive needs assessments for a number of cities and is in the process of completing a full complement of analyses of the respective situations in eight more sites. The MCI has also brought a series of medical trainings to the federal teaching hospital in Kumasi and is embarking on a comprehensive early childhood development project there, both in collaboration with the Government of Israel. Also in West Africa, the MCI has successfully partnered with the American NGO Physicians for Peace, which has delivered containers of medical supplies to the Millennium Cities of Bamako and Segou, Mali; Louga, Senegal; and Kaduna, Nigeria. Physicians for Peace also carried out a successful Vesicovaginal fistula (VVF) repair surgical clinic for the women of Kaduna. More medical equipment is being delivered to Kisumu, Kumasi and Mekelle through the MCI's partnership with another American NGO, AmeriCares. Numerous other social sector interventions are planned with all three of these and other organizations, including trainings for youth with HIV/AIDS, mental health screening and teacher training for Kisumu, and deworming and hygiene education for Mekelle.

There is a sense of great optimism in the Millennium Cities. In Kenya, newly elected Mayor Samuel Okello of Kisumu, a city much stricken by the recent turbulence following the elections in December 2007, expresses his hope "that Kisumu, together with the MCI, can attract new investment needed to rebuild the city into a tourist destination of choice hence achieve a high level of sustainable economic development contributing to attaining the MDGs by 2015." In short, the MCI has effectively leveraged its resources in many exciting areas across sub-Saharan Africa on both the investment and social sector sides, and is making great strides to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to promote sustainable urban development in all the Millennium Cities.

For further information on the investment side of MCI, please contact Co-Director Karl P. Sauvart (karl.sauvant@law.columbia.edu) or Senior Investment Advisor Joerg Simon (suma2306@yahoo.com). On the social sector side, please contact Co-Director Susan Blaustein at sblaustein@ei.columbia.edu.