

Category 8. Environment / Urban & Regional Planning

Flagship: Smart Cities and Sustainable Regions Programme – (SCSRP) – Designing eco-friendly urban spaces, resilient housing, and integrated land-use systems.

This pillar forms part of the UNESCO Read and Earn Federation’s national transformation initiatives, designed to align Nigeria’s development with UNESCO frameworks and the UN SDGs.

Nigeria is experiencing one of the fastest rates of urbanization in the world. While this presents opportunities for economic growth, it also creates challenges of inequality, environmental degradation, and vulnerability to climate change. The Smart Cities and Sustainable Regions Programme responds to these challenges by promoting inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable urban development, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda.

Strategic Vision

Nigeria’s urbanization is reframed as a **sovereign growth platform** by embedding sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience into planning, cities become:

- **Engines of wealth creation** through housing, infrastructure, and agri-tech.
- **Spaces of peace and cohesion**, reducing inequality and fostering stability.
- **Environmental heritage assets****, safeguarded for future generations while generating value through eco-tourism, carbon credits, and ESG-linked finance.

This vision is anchored in the **SDGs**, the **Paris Agreement**, and the **African Union’s Agenda 2063**, ensuring both global legitimacy and investor confidence.

Core Components

Affordable & Inclusive Cities

- Develop **low-cost, climate-resilient housing** accessible to all income groups.
- Introduce **green mortgage instruments** and **affordable city zones** to attract institutional and diaspora investors.
- Position affordable housing as both a **human right** and a **long-term yield asset class**.

Urban Agriculture & Greenhouse Farming

- Establish **greenhouse farming clusters, vertical farms, and hydroponics** within city peripheries and rooftops.
- Reduce food insecurity, cut transport emissions, and create green jobs.
- Frame urban agriculture as a **climate-resilient food security solution** and a **supply chain hedge**.

Smart & Resilient Infrastructure

- Deploy **digital governance platforms, renewable energy grids, and e-mobility systems**.
- Construct **climate-proof housing, stormwater systems, and low-carbon infrastructure**.
- Present smart infrastructure as **bankable, ESG-compliant portfolios** attractive to sovereign wealth funds and impact investors.

Integrated Land-Use Systems

- Align agriculture, housing, and industry through **sustainable zoning and land-use planning**.
- Protect **green belts, cultural landscapes, and biodiversity corridors** as part of urban expansion.
- Monetize land-use integration through **eco-tourism, biodiversity credits, and carbon markets**.

Governance & Partnerships

- Strengthen **multi-stakeholder governance frameworks**, engaging ministries, private sector, civil society, diaspora, and traditional rulers.
- Anchor decision-making in **rights-based, inclusive, and participatory processes**.
- Ensure alignment with **SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)**.

Implementation Approach

- **Rights-Based & Inclusive:** Prioritize vulnerable groups, ensuring no one is left behind.
- **Investor-Ready:** Structure financing with sovereign guarantees, blended finance, and ESG-linked instruments.
- **Community-Driven:** Empower local communities and traditional institutions as custodians of land and heritage.
- **Evidence-Based:** Use data, monitoring, and evaluation aligned with SDG indicators and global reporting standards.
- **Partnership-Oriented:** Leverage collaboration with UN agencies, development partners, and the private sector.

Risk Management & Safeguards

To ensure credibility and de-risk capital inflows, the Programme embeds a **comprehensive safeguards framework**:

- **Environmental & Social Safeguards:** Independent ESG audits, climate impact assessments, and adherence to IFC Performance Standards.
- **Community Consent:** Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) protocols for all land-use and resettlement processes.
- **Financial Risk Mitigation:** Sovereign guarantees, multilateral co-financing, and blended finance structures to protect investors.
- **Governance & Transparency:** Digital land registries, open procurement systems, and anti-corruption safeguards.
- **Insurance & Risk Transfer:** Climate risk insurance, catastrophe bonds, and resilience funds to protect assets.
- **Data & Cybersecurity:** Transparent digital governance platforms with strong data protection and cybersecurity protocols.

This framework ensures the Programme is **bankable, resilient, and globally compliant**, meeting the expectations of both development partners and institutional investors.

Expected Outcomes

- Expanded access to **affordable, resilient housing** and basic services.
- Enhanced **urban food security** through greenhouse farming and sustainable agriculture.
- Reduced **urban vulnerability to climate change** through resilient infrastructure.
- Strengthened **peace, cohesion, and heritage protection** in urban communities.
- Attraction of **sustainable investment flows**, positioning Nigeria as a leader in Africa's urban transformation.
- Recognition of cities as **heritage assets**, blending culture, environment, and development.

Investor Proposition & ROI

- **Projected FDI inflows:** \$20B by 2035 through PPPs, housing finance, and agri-tech investments.
- **Job Creation:** 3 million direct and indirect jobs in construction, ICT, and agriculture.
- **GDP Contribution:** 15% of GDP by 2035 from housing, urban planning, and agri-business.
- **Carbon Neutrality:** Alignment with **net-zero 2060 trajectory**, monetizable through carbon credits and green bonds.
- **Investor Security:** Sovereign guarantees, multilateral co-financing, and risk-sharing mechanisms.

Legacy Compact

The **Smart Cities and Sustainable Regions Programme** is both a **UN-aligned development framework** and a **sovereign investment platform**. It:

Creates wealth by transforming urbanization into a monetizable growth engine.

- **Delivers peace and stability** by embedding inclusivity and affordability.
- **Protects environmental heritage** as a capitalized, revenue-generating asset.
- **Aligns with ESG mandates** and UN climate frameworks.
- **Ensures a just transition** by embedding equity and resilience into urban growth.

Nigeria's Smart Cities and Sustainable Regions Programme is therefore positioned as both a survival imperative and a strategic opportunity, a globally credible model that transforms urbanization into wealth, peace, and heritage for Africa's future.