Degree of Urbanisation (DEGURBA)

Different countries use different criteria to define urban and rural areas, which in turn, reflect their various perspectives as to what constitutes urban and rural areas. Whilst it is advisable for countries to have their own national definitions, which can be implemented in their statistical systems as well as to disaggregate indicators by urban and rural areas for development of national policies; there is need for a definition that is both nationally relevant and internationally comparable.

The absence of a harmonised global methodology has presented challenges in comparison of the level of urbanization and indicators for urban and rural areas. These challenges have made it difficult to interpret the indicators for urbanization, as differences in definitions affect the results. To address this challenge, a proposal to develop a global definition of cities, urban and rural areas, that can be used worldwide based on the same delineation criteria for all regions and countries was put forth. This will result in a harmonised and universal mapping of cities, towns and semi-dense areas as well as rural areas. Having internationally comparable statistical information is fundamental for informed evidence-based policymaking and measuring progress towards the SDGs in both urban and rural areas.

A United Nations Resolution adopted in September 2015, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* includes several indicators for the SDGs that should be collected for cities, urban and rural areas. In light of this, six organisations – the European Commission (EC), the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO,) United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank have the to create a harmonised, simple and cost-effective methodology. This methodology allows statistics to be compiled by degree of urbanization, identifying cities, towns, semi-dense areas and rural areas. The DEGURBA approach, therefore, combines statistical and geospatial methods to identify settlement typologies and better capture the urban dimension of sustainable development.

Designing effective policies require a solid understanding of the socioeconomic conditions that exist in cities and urban areas. To effectively achieve this requires a sound knowledge base about people, their activities, communities, well-being and interaction with their environment. This calls for reliable, timely and internationally comparable datasets for different urban and rural areas, which can only be produced using a harmonised methodology that delineates cities, urban and rural areas in a consistent manner.

Six advantages of the DEGURBA methodology are that it: Captures the urban-rural continuum in a harmonised manner; Uses the same population size and density thresholds across the globe; Starts from a population grid to reduce the bias generated by the different shapes and sizes of spatial units; Measures population clusters directly; Defines areas to monitor access to services, not areas defined by access to services; and, Proposes a cost-effective approach.

Kenya has been selected as one of the 13 pilot countries in a new UN-Habitat project, whose goal is to strengthen the capacity of national governments to apply DEGURBA using locally generated data, as well as to apply resultant delineations to produce data on select SDG 11 indicators. KNBS, State department for Housing and UN-Habitat are collaborating to introduce and implement the DEGURBA approach in Kenya. It is important to note that this new methodology is not designed to replace national definitions, but to complement them with a definition that is both nationally relevant and internationally comparable.