

# A University Partnership for Metropolitan Planning: Ruiru, Kenya

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## Abstract

We are close to the mid point of a rapid expansion in the world's urban population. It is expected to continue for at least the next 50 years (United Nations Population Division, 2004). Despite the fact that over half of the global population lives in urban areas, our understanding of urban development is exceedingly limited. Making matters worse, this lack of understanding is not often recognized as a major challenge for the international development agenda. More specifically, contemporary urban planning practice and urban planning education lag significantly in posing solutions to the problems of sprawling cities in the Global South where urbanization runs far ahead of urban infrastructure and urban services.

The Center for Sustainable Urban Development (CSUD) at Columbia University's Earth Institute focuses its work on creating and applying cross-cutting urban knowledge to address the need for better urban planning and better training for urban planners. CSUD's work is mainly focused on the fast growing cities of the Global South. A principal focus of the Center's work has been directed toward Africa, as the African continent is the fastest urbanizing area in the world. Between 2000 and 2005 the average annual urban growth in Africa was 5% or almost 28% in five years (SWI Austria, 2006).

Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, had a rate of urban growth that exceeded that of the continent as a whole. It is also the home to the University of Nairobi, which hosts the oldest urban planning department in Africa. The Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) is a dynamic department with dedicated professors. CSUD entered into a partnership with DURP in April 2005 to begin addressing the cross cutting challenges of creating an urban planning practice for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the sections that follow we will discuss our experience with this two university collaboration. This experience is at once anecdotal but it also highlights some important and more general points about the nature of North-South collaborations.

*Keywords:* partnership, Ruiru, Global South, DURP, CSUD

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