

Addressing the world – An address for everyone

The white paper



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“**Urban development**, economic growth and the provision of basic services are inextricably linked to the existence of sound address infrastructures in urban and rural areas alike. My hope is that the governments of member states and other agencies worldwide will commit themselves to this initiative aimed at improving addressing infrastructures, which in turn supports individual rights and sustainable cities. Now is the time to act.”

Professor Anna Tibaijuka
Minister of Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development in Tanzania – Special Ambassador to the “Addressing the world – An address for everyone” initiative

“A quality address infrastructure must be considered as an essential part of a country’s socio-economic infrastructure, which not only improves public services, but also **facilitates business, trade and, consequently, national development**.”

Given the potential of addresses to improve people’s lives, I am convinced of the importance of raising governments’ awareness of this global issue.”

Edouard Dayan
Director General,
International Bureau,
Universal Postal Union
(UPU)



Karial slum, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Executive summary

An address infrastructure is an essential public good. Addresses facilitate the provision of public and private services, improving the response of aid and emergency services in tackling disease and natural disasters for example, while fostering social and economic development in general. Benefits extend across borders, contributing to the global well-being. As such, address infrastructure can serve as a basic foundation for the attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and other global aims.

When included as part of a nation's infrastructure, an address helps to provide social and legal identity. In its report *Making the Law Work for Everyone*, the Commission on the Legal Empowerment of the Poor identified that four billion people are excluded from the rule of law. The report claims that a large majority of these people cannot enjoy their full rights as citizens because they often lack an identity. As a person's identity is often tied to having an address, various UN organizations and other international organizations support initiatives to strengthen national address infrastructures.

Since 1999, the Universal Postal Union has assisted national authorities in assessing their addressing needs, including the design of specifications and address dissemination methodologies, to enable interoperability at the international level. In 2009, the UPU launched an ambitious initiative, "Addressing the world – An address for everyone". This initiative received the full support of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board, chaired by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The aim is to create synergies between international stakeholders and tackle a myriad of addressing challenges. To ensure the success of this initiative, there is a need for commitment at the national level, synergies between countries and organizations at the international level, and public and private sector support.

This white paper aims to enlighten political leaders on the importance of address networks. It is accompanied by a solemn declaration that serves as a call to governments to endorse and commit to the implementation of policies that strengthen national address infrastructure. Prepared in cooperation with several UN organizations and other

partners, and featuring an innovative analysis of theory and practical perspectives, this paper supports the need for a better understanding of the role of address infrastructure in social and economic development. It aims to help governments conceptualize the addressing problem so that the goal of an address for everyone can be achieved.

Address infrastructure as a global public good

Societies are formed to ensure their common welfare, and the basis of this welfare is the provision of certain essential elements, or public goods. Two key characteristics distinguish public goods from private goods: their non-rival and non-excludable properties. Once provided, goods with non-rival and non-excludable properties allow individuals to utilize the goods in question without reducing their availability for others and without impeding their use by others.

Since the link between types of usage, benefits and supply cannot be clearly identified, public goods have unclear property rights, which represents a fundamental difference between them and private goods. As a result, the free market cannot ensure the efficient supply of public goods, such as national peace and security. For example, a national security system is a “pure public good” as it protects all inhabitants of a nation, without exclusion, and cannot be exhausted by the addition of new inhabitants. Such is the case with address infrastructure.

With the advent of globalization, public goods have increasingly acquired cross-border significance. These global goods are determined through international cooperation, consensus and convention, such as the Millennium Development Goals – for which address infrastructure constitutes a significant enabler.

There is no doubt that addressing – the network of road names and house numbers – constitutes a key element of functioning societies. While a single address in itself does not constitute a public good, the national address infrastructure, of which it forms a part, is an essential public good, and through interoperability with international systems the totality of addressing networks can be determined as a global public good. Address infrastructure provides access to the rights and duties of citizens from the local to the international level, as well as providing businesses with access to markets. All echelons of society should thus have equal access to address infrastructure in order to capture the social and economic benefits at the local, national and international levels.

The practical benefits of addresses

Addressing policies at the national level are often pushed aside in favour of more immediate policy needs. However, by providing a fundamental knowledge base to inform decision making and action, addresses help to develop, implement and support other critical national policies.

Governance

Identifying citizens, reinforcing the rule of law, expanding electoral participation and implementing e-government are features of good governance, all of which are supported by an address infrastructure. Without an address, it is harder for individuals to register as legal residents. They are excluded from access to public services and institutions, and denied the rights of citizenship. This includes access to democracy. Addresses allow individuals to register to vote and permit governments to map voter districts and populations, aiding appropriate policy development and transparency.



Busan, Korea

Urban development and management

Over the last few decades, developing countries have witnessed an explosion in rural to urban migration, posing a myriad of problems for governments. The result has been the growth of informal settlements, which, according to some estimates, comprise a third of urban populations in developing countries. These areas house the urban poor, who are excluded from basic services like water and sanitation, and subject to weak infrastructure. Addresses help to map areas that are often overlooked, while providing a platform for vital census data gathering and infrastructure planning.

Migration and social integration

In areas that suffer from isolation and exclusion, an address promotes peace and social cohesion by fostering exchange between communities and the government. Furthermore, the identification of culturally important areas can generate community awareness of shared culture, thereby ensuring their preservation. More fundamentally,

living in an area without an address prejudices the procurement of formal employment or quality education. In countries that lack address infrastructure, many businesses are unable to register themselves because they lack mandatory information, such as an address. As a result, they are forced to remain informal, and they are barred from accessing finance, banking, other supports and payment of duties.

Security

Unidentified and inaccessible areas within the national territory provide a breeding ground for crime, insecurity and violence, which contribute to the internationalization of organized crime, affecting both the national and global welfare. Spatial organization data, including addresses, provides governments with the ability to identify, locate and access marginalized areas in order to incorporate them into the nation.

Economy and commerce

When linked to governance, law, social policies and planning, addresses help to ensure protection of investments for individuals and the private sector. By creating a reliable environment for public and private sector transactions, a secure address infrastructure benefits the economy and commerce, by improving the transfer of goods and services from producers to consumers, nationally and internationally. This is especially true for postal businesses, which benefit immensely from the development of delivery points, increasing their ability to reach more customers and provide truly universal service.

Information and technology

The right of all people to access ICTs is a Millennium Development Goal. However, barriers to the access and expansion of networks remain. In this respect, addresses continue to serve an important role as a universal means of communication between individuals and governments. Address infrastructure supports ICTs in three ways: (1) as an infrastructure upon which to build other systems; (2) as a complementary information system; and (3) as an alternative to hi-tech systems, which may be unevenly distributed.

Environmental sustainability and risk and disaster management

As cities grow, efforts must be taken to make them environmentally sustainable and resilient to disasters. Cities that grow beyond their set boundaries often infringe on fragile ecosystems, increasing their vulnerability to disease and natural disasters. Address infrastructure can support the mapping and appraisal of risk areas and national resources, by identifying and confirming the location of vulnerable areas and populations. Additionally, correct addressing provides for a system of clear

routes, labelled streets and identifiable houses, which facilitate the creation of practical strategies for delivering goods and services when natural disasters or disease outbreaks strike.

Partners in the initiative

Eight international organizations (African Union (AU), EUROpean ADDRESS INFRASTRUCTURE (EURADIN), International Organization for Standardization (ISO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) and the World Bank (WB)) and five countries (Costa Rica, Denmark, India, Korea (Rep.) and Tanzania) have contributed to this white paper by providing insights into the individual challenges and opportunities they face in the fulfilment of their activities with or without sound addressing systems.

Conclusion

Individuals, governments and businesses are all stakeholders of address infrastructure. Investing in address infrastructure is a fundamental step in connecting people to public and private services, and human rights. But beyond the individual significance, address infrastructure enables the good of the nation and the global population by setting the foundation on which critical national policies can be built. However, building this infrastructure requires a common awareness and action plan that is supported at the local, national and international levels. Political willpower is the key to guaranteeing that an address infrastructure is developed for the benefit of all.



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New Delhi, India

“It is essential that this work reach those who need it most ... To be effective, national governments must step up their commitment to **expand access to information and knowledge** through effective networks for the benefit of all.”

Irina Bokova
Director-General, UNESCO

“We must recognize the critical importance of interconnection and convergence between addresses’ electronic and physical dimensions, and then **ensure that all of the world’s people are connected**, whatever the means of communication.”

Dr Hamadoun Touré
Secretary-General, International
Telecommunication Union (ITU)

“At UN-HABITAT, we are convinced that **everyone has the right to an address**. If you do not have an address, you do not officially exist.”

Dr. Joan Clos
Under-Secretary-General,
United Nations – Executive
Director, United Nations
Settlements Programme
(UN-HABITAT)

“Recognizing the key **role of addresses as an infrastructure** ..., the AU Commission has decided to include address infrastructure in its priorities for the current and forthcoming strategic plan.”

Dr. Elham M. A. Ibrahim
Commissioner, Infrastructure
and Energy, African Union
Commission (AU)

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