6

Perspectives on Africa's urbanisation from policy makers and experts

This chapter includes contributions from five high-level policy makers and experts who follow, contribute to and influence the evolving policy debate on urbanisation in Africa. The essays represent a diversity of views on the potential of urban economies, the challenges and the policies needed to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic prosperity.

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Which national and local policies can enable local governments to play a greater role in the socio-economic development of Africa?

Most of Africa's population will soon live in cities. Its cities will continue to grow rapidly, and projections indicate that by 2050, they will be home to an additional 950 million inhabitants (OECD/SWAC, 2020[1]). Cities already produce 60% of the continent's GDP. Increasingly Africa's economic future will be tied to their attractiveness, economic performance and proper functioning.

Decentralisation policies have given cities and rural areas a greater role to play in Africa's socio-economic development. These policies recognise subnational and local governments as local public authorities with the administrative and financial autonomy to develop public policy at the municipal and regional level, by applying national policies or modifying them to fit specific and varied contexts.

The political will for decentralisation was confirmed at the highest levels by African Union heads of state and government in 2014 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, when the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development was adopted as an African Union instrument. The adoption of the Charter showed that Africa's highest-ranking officials appreciate the magnitude of the contribution of cities and rural areas to the structural transformation of Africa and that they would like to see it amplified, to reinforce the continent's socio-economic development.

Four key issues must be considered for subnational and local governments to achieve the desired results: 1) strengthening the implementation framework for decentralisation; 2) organising the financial relationships between national and subnational governments; 3) improving the performance of subnational government administrations; 4) engaging subnational and local governments in strategic planning.

Strengthening the decentralisation policy implementation framework

All African countries that have adopted a decentralisation policy see it as a way of anchoring democracy and improving the governance of public affairs through a more direct relationship between the contributions made by the citizenry in the form of taxes and fees, on the one hand, and the services they receive from subnational and local governments in return, on the other

hand. It is assumed that subnational and local public authorities are more effective than national administrations at meeting the needs and expectations of the people.

Nevertheless, national administrations continue to perform duties that are legally recognised as falling under the authority of subnational governments, despite the provisions in the laws and regulations governing the transfer of authority to local governments. This is being done despite the formal recognition of the role of local public authorities in the people's expectation of participating in the management of their own affairs and their access to essential services. In practice, this is still being carried out by representatives of line ministries on the ground. This effectively perpetuates the practice of working in silos at the subnational and local level, a practice that is condemned at the national level. This situation introduces uncertainties over the autonomy of subnational and local governments in initiating and conducting local affairs. It is also likely to lead to a crisis of confidence between the people and public authorities at the city and local level, developing into a broader crisis of confidence between the people and public authorities in general, whether national or local, and provoking a general governance crisis within society. This lack of progress on decentralisation is without doubt the biggest obstacle preventing subnational and local governments from playing a more significant role in Africa's socio-economic development.

Every three years since 2012 and in collaboration with Cities Alliance, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Africa has conducted an evaluation of the institutional environment established by national governments in Africa to encourage initiatives and actions undertaken by subnational and local governments (UCLGA, Cities Alliance, 2018[2]). In 2018, the institutional environment created by the national government was judged "favourable" or "somewhat favourable" to the initiatives taken by cities and local governments in 16 out of 53 countries, while 37 countries were ranked "overall unfavourable" or "not at all favourable" (Figure 6.1). In other words, much work remains to be done before the political will expressed at the highest levels becomes a reality. That work will need to include: clarifying the roles and competencies of public authorities at the national, subnational and local level; promoting co-operative governance

between the national and local levels by effectively implementing the principle of subsidiarity; and better co-ordinating public policies on the ground by adopting a local approach to development, to balance the sector-based approach widely favoured until now.

This effort should also give subnational and local governments the opportunity to open up to decentralised partnerships for co-operation, in initiatives that would include intercommunal co-operation programmes and decentralised cross-border co-operation programmes.

Figure 6.1. Country results for 2012, 2015 and 2018 based on the quality of the national institutional environment

2012		2015		2018	
South Africa	33	South Africa	35	South Africa	37
Uganda	31	Uganda	34	Uganda	35
Morocco	30	Morocco	31	Tanzania	32
		Kenya	30	Morocco	31
Kenya	28	Zambia	29	Kenya	29
Rwanda	28	Rwanda	28	Zimbabwe	29
Ghana	26	Tanzania	28	Ghana	29
Tanzania	25	Zimbabwe	28	Rwanda	28
Botswana	24	Benin	27	Zambia	28
Nigeria	24	Ghana	26	Benin	28
Senegal	24	Namibia	25	Senegal	27
Cameroon	23	Senegal	25	Sierra Leone	27
Gabon	23	Swaziland	25	Burkina Faso	26
Namibia	23	Botswana	24	Burundi	25
Zimbabwe	23	Burundi	24	Swaziland	25
Niger	23	Malawi	24	Niger	25
Sierra Leone	23	Niger	24	Madagascar	24
Benin	22	Nigeria	24	Cameroon	24
Burkina Faso	22	Burkina Faso	23	Malawi	24
Burundi	21	Cameroon	23	Namibia	24
Eritrea	21	Gabon	23	Côte d'Ivoire	24
Chad	21	Mali	23	Gabon	23
Mauritania	21	Mauritania	23	Mauritania	23
Lesotho	21	Sierra Leone	23	Botswana	23
Swaziland	21	Chad	23	Mali	23
Gambia	21	Eritrea	21	Nigeria	23
Ethiopia	20	Gambia	21	Tunisia	23
Angola	20	Lesotho	21	Chad	22
Algeria	20	Algeria	20	Eritrea	21
Tunisia	20	Angola	20	Seychelles	21
Zambia	20	Côte d'Ivoire	20	Lesotho	21
Côte d'Ivoire	20	Ethiopia	20	Gambia	21
Mali	20	Madagascar	20	Djibouti	20
				Ethiopia	20
				Angola	20
				Algeria	20
				Guinea	20
São Tomé and Príncipe	19	São Tomé and Príncipe	19	São Tomé and Príncipe	19
Djibouti	18	Tunisia	19	Togo	19
Malawi	18	Djibouti	18	Comoros	18
Madagascar	17	Republic of the Congo	17	Republic of the Congo	18
Republic of the Congo	17	Egypt	17	DR of the Congo	18
Equatorial Guinea	17	Guinea	17	Equatorial Guinea	17
Egypt	17	Equatorial Guinea	17	Egypt	17
Mozambique	16	Mozambique	17	Mozambique	17
Togo	16	Togo	16	Liberia	14
Seychelles	15	Comoros	15	Guinea-Bissau	13
DR of the Congo	15	DR of the Congo	15	Central African Republic	13
Guinea-Bissau	14	Seychelles	15	Sudan	13
Central African Republic	13	Guinea-Bissau	14	Somalia	12
Comoros	12	Central African Republic	13		
Somalia	12	Somalia	12		
Sudan	12	Sudan	12		
Liberia	11	Liberia	11		

Organising financial relationships between states and subnational and local governments

Africa's subnational and local government revenues, as a share of total public revenues and of GDP, are the second lowest in the world, at 12.3% and 3.3% respectively (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2. Financial autonomy of local authorities in Africa lags far behind global averages

Sub-national government revenue,
% of total public revenues and % of GDP (2013)

| Region	% of public revenues	% of GDP
Africa	12.9	3.3
Asia-Pacific	35.0	10.4
Eurasia	25.5	8.2
Europe	27.7	12.0
Latin America & the Caribbean	21.2	5.8
Middle East & West Asia	9.8	3.2
Northern America	63.1	22.7

Source: UCLG

Africa's sub-national government revenues, both as a percentage of total public revenues and of GDP, are the second lowest after the Middle East & West Asia region.

In 2017, Tanzania devolved 21.8% of public revenues to its subnational governments, followed closely by Uganda and Mali (18.2% and 14.0%, respectively). Meanwhile, the figures for Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Malawi, Niger and Togo are all below 6.0%.
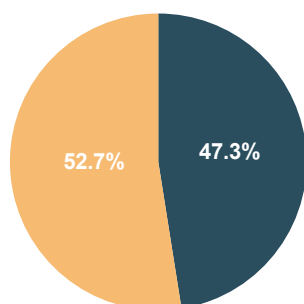
Monthly oil revenue allocation

- Directly to producing states
- Deposited in federation account

13%

87%
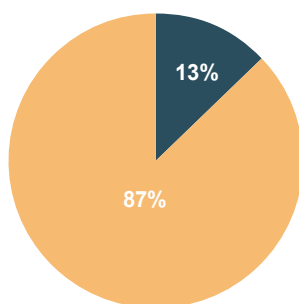
Federation account allocations

- Allocated to local and state governments via the revenue
- Retained at federal level

52.7% 47.3%

NRGI and UNDP

Local financial independence: Mostly limited

In **Ghana**, the District Assemblies are tasked with raising taxes, while the District Assemblies Common Fund ensures that funding from the central government reaches each district, based on a needs-based equalisation formula. While providing only 37.0% of district income, this system ensures that local government receives a guaranteed amount of income which can be used at its discretion, thus providing some amount of financial independence.

Ethiopia's fiscal decentralisation guarantees each level of government the capacity to finance its own development. Fiscal decentralisation remains limited, however, as central government controls 80.0% of income resources, such as taxes on international trade, leaving only 20.0% for the regions.

In **Nigeria**, the oil revenue redistribution system benefits all levels of governments. It is a complex intergovernmental transfer system that is based both on indicators and derivation. The country allocates no less than 13.0% of oil revenues to nine producing states by derivation. The rest (87.0%) is pooled with other fiscal revenues and redistrbuted across all states. Of the pool, about 47.3% is allocated to states and municipalities based on a formula that considers factors such as population size, social development efforts and revenue-raising efforts. The remaining 52.7% is allocated to central government.

World Bank

Source (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2018, p. 41[3]) Public Service in Africa, 2018 Ibrahim Forum Report

Traditionally, subnational governments have two revenue streams: financial transfers from the central government resulting from the devolution to subnational and local authorities of competencies previously attributed to national authorities; and own financial resources of subnational and local government, generated by applying the principle of free administration and financial autonomy of subnational governments.

In most African countries, the implementation of decentralisation is uneven, due to the fact that the transfer of competencies to subnational and local governments is often not accompanied by a transfer of the requisite resources. The regulations governing financial transfers from national to local governments are generally speaking imperfect, with the amount of the transfers and their timing unpredictable. This situation makes it especially difficult for Africa's subnational governments to account for transfers when drafting their annual budgets. This situation can be further complicated when subnational and local government leaders are not of the same political stripe as those in power at the national level.

For that reason, one of the improvements most frequently requested by national local government associations involves earmarking a predetermined percentage of the state budget for allocation to subnational and local governments. Another involves adopting an objective and democratic formula for dividing up the financial resources that central governments allocate to subnational and local governments and establishing transparent procedures for channelling the agreed-upon funds to subnational and local budgets. Setting up a fund jointly managed by the ministry of finance, the ministry of local government and the national association of local governments, into which state grants to local governments are deposited, is often proposed as one of the best ways to make financial transfers from the national to subnational governments more efficient and predictable. For the second level of local government, it has been suggested that regional-state contracts be set up for programmes in which the division of responsibilities and the flow of financial resources are negotiated and decided on in advance.

The ability of subnational and local governments to mobilise their own resources is a function of the degree of autonomy established for them in laws and regulations governing the imposition of taxes, duties and fees; the setting and evaluating of duties, fees and tax bases; and collecting these duties, fees and taxes. The situation for subnational and local governments varies and often depends on the administrative culture inherited from the colonial era. The leeway of subnational and local governments in Francophone countries is much more limited than it is for their counterparts in English-speaking countries. In Francophone countries, the single-till rule applies, under which all subnational and local government public monies are paid into the Treasury's coffers. This limits the scope of local financial autonomy, since a municipality can be entitled to Treasury resources without being able to use them, because the national state may have allocated them to some other use. (In municipalities in most Francophone countries, setting the tax base and collecting taxes are the responsibility of the national fiscal administration, whose main priority is to meet the needs of the national state. For this reason, it is not surprising that the efficacy of local taxation is not what it should be, because fiscal administration staff are not evaluated based primarily on the efficacy of local taxation.) Hence the other major improvement requested by subnational governments: greater involvement in the taxation chain, by recognising their authority to set and manage taxes and fees, and granting them greater authority in collecting taxes, levies and fees. Subnational and local governments in Francophone countries consistently request greater flexibility in the application of the single-till rule or call for its outright abolition.
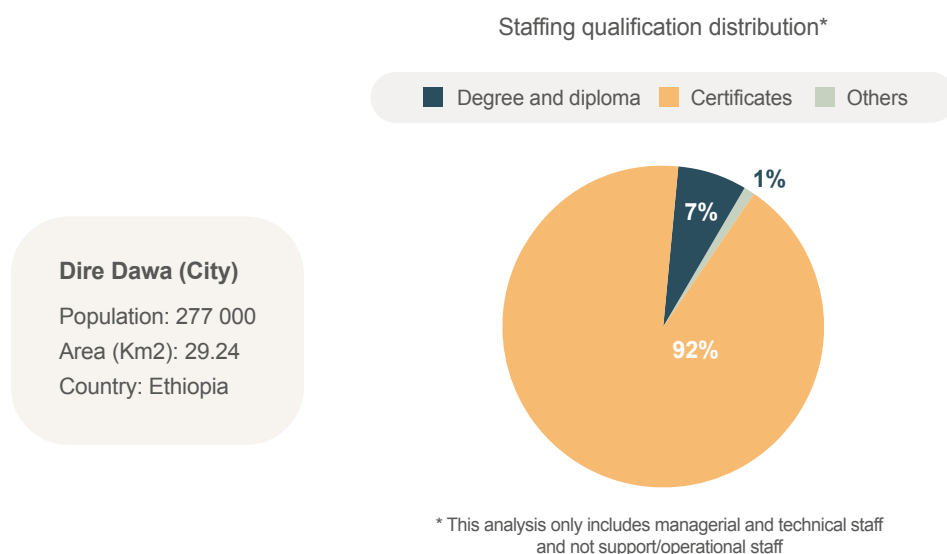
Experts estimate that an annual investment in African cities of about USD 80 billion is needed in the next 10 to 15 years to tap into the continent's economic potential, to ensure that the conditions are in place to accommodate a growing urban population, and to reduce the accumulated deficit in urban infrastructure and equipment significantly. Africa's subnational and local governments are expected to contribute some USD 25 billion per year from their budgets, but these estimates far exceed their annual resources. In addition, investing in urban infrastructure and equipment is crucial to generating wealth, creating jobs and improving the living conditions of the urban population. These investments are amortised over the long term, which means that access to loans, financial markets and public/private partnerships is crucial if they are to be able to make them. For that reason, UCLG Africa provides support for African subnational and local government leaders to lobby national governments for access to financial markets. With this in mind, UCLG Africa took the initiative of establishing the African Territorial Agency, a financial vehicle that enables the continent's cities and territories to access loans and financial markets, to help to meet the urgent need for infrastructure and equipment.
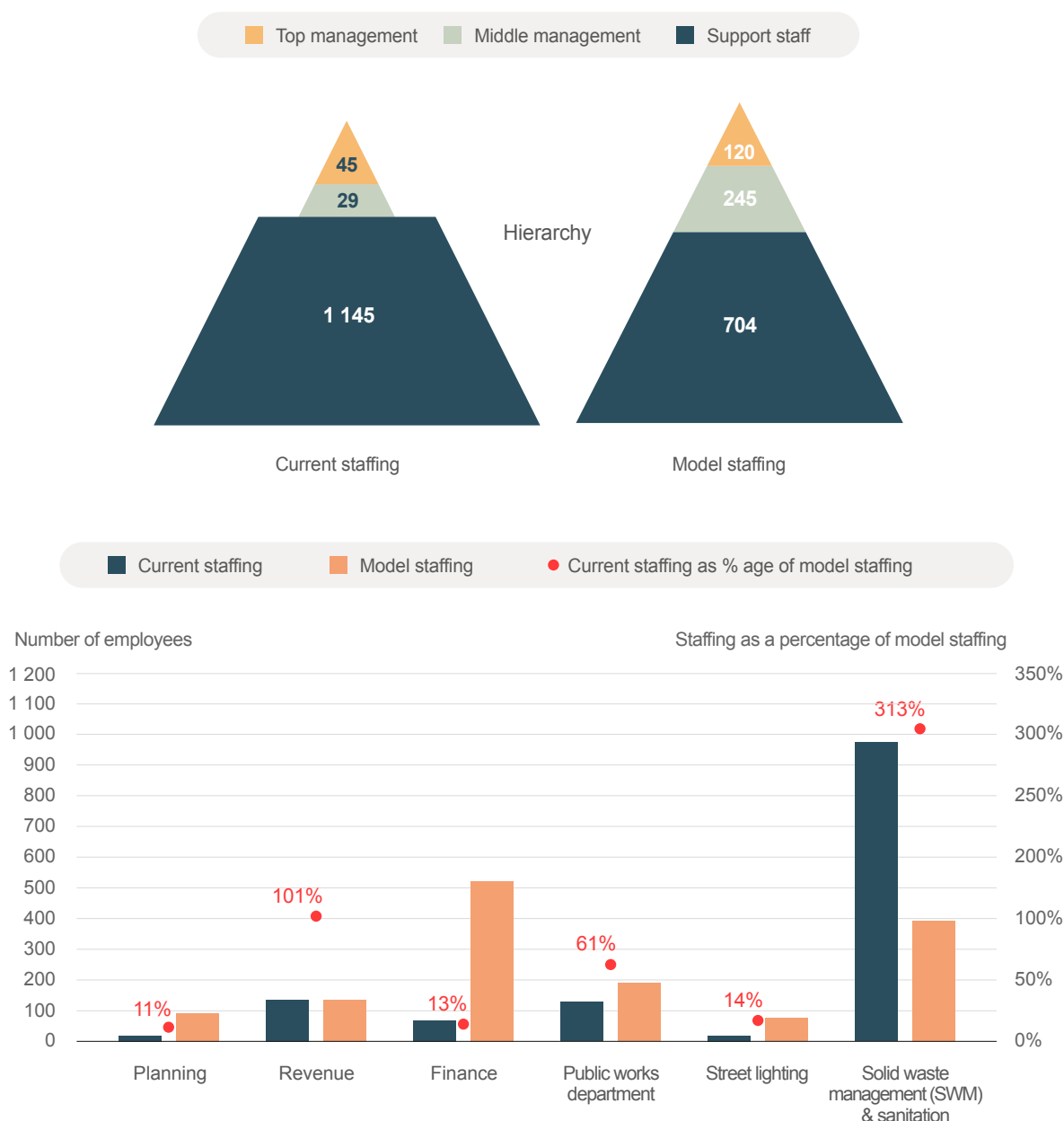
Improving the performance of the subnational government administration

Africa's subnational and local governments are under-managed and under-supported. Subnational and local administrations suffer from chronic deficits in the number and quality of management staff and from low pay levels. A study of the human resource capacity of 16 African cities and local governments by Cities Alliance showed that subnational local govern-

ment administrations have management staff ratios of 1.4 per 1,000 inhabitants. This fulfils only 30% of the estimated need, and is significantly below management staff ratios in the local governments of developed countries, at 36 staff members per 1,000 inhabitants (Cities Alliance, 2017[3]). The study also noted that senior management of local government administrations generally earn 20% to 30% less than their counterparts working in national governments or the private sector.

Figure 6.3. An overview of the human resources capacity analysis for the city of Dire Dawa, Ethiopia

Staffing qualification distribution*

■ Degree and diploma ■ Certificates ■ Others

Dire Dawa (City)

Population: 277 000
Area (Km2): 29.24
Country: Ethiopia

1%
7%
92%

* This analysis only includes managerial and technical staff
and not support/operational staff

Legend: Top management · Middle management · Support staff

Hierarchy

Current staffing — 45 / 29 / 1 145
Model staffing — 120 / 245 / 704

Legend: Current staffing · Model staffing · Current staffing as % age of model staffing

Number of employees — Staffing as a percentage of model staffing

Planning 11%, Revenue 101%, Finance 13%, Public works department 61%, Street lighting 14%, Solid waste management (SWM) & sanitation 313%

Source (Cities Alliance, 2017[3]), Human Resources Capacity Benchmarking, A Preliminary Toolkit for Planning and Management in Africa, https://www.citiesalliance.org/sites/default/files/Final%20Report%20on%20Municipal%20Staffing%20Toolkit_0.pdf.

Local government hiring is still often based on political and personal relationships rather than on merit or professional criteria. The politicisation of hiring practices, low managerial capacity, insufficient capacity for project preparation and structuring, as well as technical and financial modelling, are some of the factors contributing to the low level of performance of local government administration.

There is an urgent need to make human resource capacity a priority concern of subnational governments.

Decentralisation will not produce the anticipated outcomes until the human resource issues facing local governments are taken seriously. The African Local Government Academy (ALGA) was set up by UCLG Africa to address the daunting problem of capacity development and professionalism of human resources in African cities and territories. In that context, it has established the Observatory of Local Governments' Human Resources to define benchmarks for managerial performance in the administrations of Africa's cities

and territories. Every three years, the Observatory publishes a report on the state of human resources in Africa's cities and territories, in an attempt to cultivate a culture of evaluating and comparing the performance of Africa's subnational governments.

African subnational and local governments need to engage in strategic planning

The speed of urban growth urgently requires an expansion of data and information to anticipate the rapidly changing needs of the citizens and to plan the response to meeting those needs. For Africa's cities and local governments, it is crucial to monitor the dynamics of urbanisation, and most subnational and local governments do not have statistics or planning departments with the capacity to keep track of these developments. The statistical tools they do have were developed for the needs of the national administration and are not sufficiently granular to detect the changes taking place at the local level. Approaches like those developed by the Africapolis team are no doubt a step in the right direction. This approach and the associated data systems must be made more widely available and adapted to local government needs. If it is true that what cannot be properly measured cannot be properly managed, then data and monitoring tools are the basis for strategic planning.

Current estimates indicate an average urban population growth rate in Africa of around 4% to 7% per year until 2050, which would double the urban population in the next 20 years. Such rapid, sustained growth is unparalleled in recent human history, and calls for a strategic approach to the five main functions expected of local government, namely: 1) ensuring food security for the community; 2) planning and building shelter for the community; 3) providing the community with basic services; 4) maintaining community infrastructure, equipment and basic services; 5) administering and governing the community.

The COVID-19 crisis has called attention to the shortcomings of development policies that have placed too much weight on subnational and local governments inserting themselves into the global economy. The health crisis has shed light on the limits of the current model, which is based on unlimited borrowing and on a disregard for the natural environment. African cities and local governments are poised to turn away from that model to take a new, more sustainable path to development, with greater respect for natural ecosystems. For optimum resilience and to be socially more inclusive and just, it should be based on the logic of the circular economy, with a smaller ecological footprint. Africa's subnational governments, the small- and medium-size cities in particular, are far less anchored in the fossil-fuel economy and are thus well placed to begin to shift to a development model with better respect for the cohabitation of human beings and other species. This will require relocating the means of production close to consumption sites and promoting production methods that consume fewer natural resources and reduce consumption in general.

Subnational and local governments of Africa are well placed to take responsibility to divert humanity's models of production and consumption onto a more sustainable trajectory, just as Africa is poised to become home to the world's largest population.

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What to do about 'Waithood' in African Cities?

What do you do when you are young and poor? How do you trigger a shift in status from extreme poverty? How do you catch hold of the promised "better tomorrow"? In Africa, where about 450 million people are aged between 15 and 34 years old (Rocca and Schultes, 2020[4]) what happens is that they move to the city. African youth aspire to move to urban areas where they perceive there will be greater opportunities (Lawanson, 2018[5]).

While the average able-bodied youth sees migration to the city as a rite of passage into adulthood, the chances are that they lack the education and/or skills required to stand a real chance (Min-Harris, 2009[6]). Over 100 million school-age children in Africa are not in school, a figure that has risen considerably as a result of COVID-19 (UNICEF, 2020[7]). In South Africa alone, as of July 2021, over 400 000 children had dropped out of school in the previous 16 months (UNICEF, 2021[8]).

Without the requisite skills, opportunities are limited to the margins of urban life, leaving youth access only to precarious employment and housing in informal settlements. Even among the educated, millions of university undergraduates are unable to access jobs in the formal sector. In Nigeria, for example, graduates may remain unemployed for up to ten years and are forced to resort to menial jobs for survival (Kazeem, 2020[9]).

'Waithood'

Whatever their background, African youth for the most part cannot partake fully and independently in the privileges and responsibilities of adult life. Given the socio-economic inequalities prevalent in urban areas, and the inherent hostility to informality in many cities, their very presence is considered unlawful, and they must constantly battle institutional antagonism and marginalisation in order to survive.

Alcinda Honwana (2013[10]) has described this situation as "Waithood", a prolonged period of suspension in which young people's access to social adulthood is delayed or denied. This means that they are compelled to improvise livelihoods and conduct their personal relations outside dominant economic and familial frameworks. During the period of "Waithood", two things can occur – innovation or disruption. Over the last 20 years in Africa, both have occurred simultaneously, with a spate of youth-led innovations as well as youth-led protest movements, many of which have turned violent.

Another form of "Waithood" is caused by conflict. African cities are disproportionately affected by conflict-induced migrations, both forced and voluntary. Waves of young people flee conflict to resettle in large cities (Institute of Migration, 2020[11]). While many countries have designated camps for internally displaced persons (IDP), the brutal conditions within these camps often force youth elsewhere in search of an independent livelihood. Generally speaking, they tend to move to cities where they expect to find better opportunities and safer environments. Lagos, Johannesburg, Monrovia and Nairobi have seen the arrival of hundreds of thousands of young people seeking safety and a way to support themselves. However, because their skills are often incompatible with life in the city, they are automatically predisposed to life on the margins and the multiple vulnerabilities that entails.

Waithood as an urban threat

African countries present a high risk of civil conflict, based on three key stress factors: the high proportion of youth; rapid urban growth; and exceptionally low levels of access to resources (Cincotta, Engelman and D., 2003[12]). Almost 16 million young Africans are currently facing unemployment, with a generally higher incidence in urban areas (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2019[13]). Women are more negatively impacted because it is easier for men to get jobs than it is for women, even if they have equivalent skills and experience (Igbohor, 2017[14]).

High youth unemployment is an impending threat to national stability, since the failure to secure a decent livelihood triggers restiveness, with dire socio-economic and political consequences. This is highlighted in the motive-oriented literature on civil violence and the Frustration-Aggression and Relative Deprivation theories, which suggest that individuals turn aggressive when there are latent or real impediments to their route to success in life, especially when their material basic needs are not met (Moller, 1968[15]). Such discontent has been demonstrated in recent years in Sahr, Khartoum, Dakar, Tunis, Cairo, Kampala, Lagos and Ouagadougou, to mention a few, in protest of issues ranging from poor governance, high youth unemployment, police brutality and the high cost of living.

Interestingly, education is a major factor in how these protests play out. For example, the "#FeesMust-Fall" protests in South Africa in 2015, and the "End SARS" protests in Nigeria in 2020, were led by educated youth and sustained through social media activism and debate (Agbor, Taiwo and Smith, 2012[16]). Although they effectively shut down economic life in the affected cities, the protests were for the most part nonviolent. The same cannot be said of the brigandage and destruction practiced by the Niger Delta militants, Al-Shabab, Boko Haram and other extremist groups and criminal gangs (Honwana, 2015[17]). These radical groups often recruit school children who are seeking a meal or even protection (UNICEF, 2020[18]).

Structural violence is also a threat when cities systematically keep people in poverty and material vulnerability (Bornstein, 2005[19]). Migrant children and children in slums and informal settlements are especially exposed. In many cities, they are forgotten and cut off from social services and education, leaving them prey to multiple threats that pose a risk both to their well-being and to that of the city. Youth IDPs also contribute to expanding existing city slums, increasing the number of homeless people living on the streets. They are also responsible for the emergence of new slums, when their temporary shacks at the urban peripheries become unwholesome fixtures (Roberts and Lawanson, 2021[20]). Since their skills are incompatible with urban life, and in the absence of social safety mechanisms, their prospects are limited to life as petty traders, labourers or informal transport sector workers. Young men and boys are targets for recruitment into criminal gangs, while young women and girls are lured into juvenile prostitution, child marriage, teenage pregnancies and human trafficking.

This vicious cycle may continue for generations.

Leveraging technology, surviving Waithood

Youth entrepreneurs make up an important segment of the micro, small and medium enterprise sectors. Young people are more likely to employ their peers (ILO, 2020[21]), and relations of reciprocity, solidarity and caring for the most vulnerable orientate their efforts to support themselves and others, as for example during the COVID-19 crisis (Diepeveen, Tant and Bailey-Athias, 2021[22]). These communities of care are seldom recognised in official economic projections.

Educated youth have explored a shift towards online income-generating opportunities. Even though fewer women are employed in the digital tech sector (Toesland, 2018[23]), more are joining its ranks as an alternative to a career in the corporate sector, where company policies on marriage and child-bearing often penalise women (Matotoka, 2021[24]).

Jobs in the tech sector range from creating apps, trading digital currencies, operating in social media marketplaces, to freelancing and gig work. By doing this, many young people are able to plug into the global economy and make enough to get by. However, this involves the expense of data and devices, and can be frustrating when arbitrary government policies are enacted.

The restrictions on cryptocurrency transactions and the outright ban of Twitter in Nigeria have crippled foreign direct investment in the fin-tech industry and negatively impacted millions of young Nigerians who earn a living from the sector. Many have found a way, however, to lawfully bypass these restrictions and continue business, effectively denying Nigeria the taxes and transaction fees that would otherwise come into the system (Baydakova, 2021[25]).

Similarly, the Lagos transport sector has been severely impacted by the government policy banning the activities of commercial motorcycles. The Lagos state government-financed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is only able to cater for 200 000 passengers daily (BRT Data, 2021[26]), less than 10% of all travel around the city. Commuters thus rely on the informal sector – minibuses (*Danfo*), tricycles (*keke*) and motorcycle taxis (*okada*) – as the main forms of travel. Some youth-led companies (e.g. Max and Gokada) have pioneered formalising the *okada* by bringing structure and innovation to the sector: introducing an app for ride hailing, standardising fares, profiling and training riders and ensuring bikes can be tracked and riders' behaviour monitored. This has increased safety in the sector, as well as livelihood outcomes for many riders. However, in February 2020, the state government banned commercial motorcycles in most parts of the state, effectively halting tax-paying businesses that had employed thousands of people and invested over USD 200 million in the Lagos economy (Oluka, 2020[27]). The ban increased the influx of *okada* into Lagos, as an easy source of employment for uneducated, undocumented migrants. This has led to a practical breakdown in the regulation of the sector and violent clashes between untrained *okada* riders and state security agencies attempting to enforce the ban (Baer Arnorld, 2013[28]).

The governance gap

In many African cities, leaders' aspirations for economic development are often disconnected from the lived realities of young residents. The nexus between youth migrations and urbanisation in Africa is not well

understood, and policy responses are often inappro-priate or ineffective (Amare et al., 2021[29]). Many African countries have signed The New Urban Agenda, which commits them to supporting migrants, refugees and displaced people in urban settings, and helping them to gain access to an adequate standard of living and opportunities for productive and decent work. The reality is that many migrants are undocumented and are unable to access this support, where it exists. The lack of relevant data further complicates the process of urban integration of migrants or even of designing targeted interventions.

Urban development policies that do not recognise the formal-informal continuum destroy the livelihoods of the urban poor. Laws and regulations that crimi-nalise informal economic activities are short-sighted, whether in the case of the ban on commercial motor-cycle taxis or even policies intended to increase environmental responsibility.

The African Union's ambitious goal is that "African cities will be recycling at least 50% of the waste they generate by 2023" (UNEP, 2018[30]). Low-income urban communities are the most active recyclers, since they are able to support environmental policies while exchanging plastics for socio-economic value, including jobs, education for children and even dignity (Racapé, 2019[31]; Global Opportunity Explorer, 2018[32]). However, waste picking is an unlawful activity in many cities, including Lagos and Johannesburg (Harrisberg, 2019[33]), where state attempts to restructure the sector, introduce privatisation and increase foreign investment fail to recognise or include these important components of the waste management value chain.

Poverty alleviation and youth development po-licies in many African cities also tend to be tokenist. Many programmes introduced to facilitate economic development are not inclusive and do not provide opportunities for everyone. Social intervention pro-grammes that focus on offering tangible welfare packages like free food, cash transfers or short-term jobs with insecure tenure do little to provide access to secure, sustainable livelihoods. The focus on vocational training often fails to offer support for establishing small businesses, or even mechanisms for accessing capital and the business management skills necessary to scale up these small businesses. Youth-led enter-prises thus remain perpetually on the fringes of the economy.

Where public dissent emerges in opposition to government decisions, city and national authorities are quick to resort to violence rather than embrace dialogue. The direct consequence is that the educated

migrate abroad, resulting in a brain drain, while others pursue more dangerous, irregular migration options. As many as 45% of adult Nigerians (Connor and Gonzalez-Barrera, 2019[34]) wish to leave the country, a number that has increased in the aftermath of the 2020 "End SARS" protests (Ishaku, 2021[35]). It is estimated that there are more African trained scientists and skilled professionals working abroad than on the con-tinent (Woldegiorgis and Scherer, 2019[36]). As of 2015, 13 584 African-educated physicians were working in the United States and in 2017, about 9 946 in the United Kingdom (Irune, 2018[37]).

Towards a better urban future for African youth

A better tomorrow is possible only if the future of African urban youth is made a deliberately priority. Economic development in African cities and countries can be enhanced by initiatives designed to engage all categories of youth. For this, accurate, reliable and disaggregated data is required. It will also require clarity and consistency of economic and development decisions, as well as study of multisectoral linkages to mitigate unintended negative consequences.

The lack of emphasis on co-productive processes in policy development and implementation is perhaps why many policies fail in this part of the world. The concept of the urban commons and the potential of collaborative design and development of cities should be recognised and amplified. Inclusiveness will be a natural by-product of this process, as will safe and accessible civic spaces for engagement and non-violent dissent.

Urban planning and development solutions will be crucial for arresting socio-economic disparities. These solutions must prioritise the needs of chil-dren and youth. For example, education and training for children in slums and IDP camps should be set up, along with safety nets for urban integration, bearing in mind the gendered dynamics of urban vulnerability. Furthermore, programmes to improve camp conditions and promote urban renewal should focus on *in situ* upgrades and improvements in health and well-being.

Pro-poor development policies should specifically target youth employment and empowerment, bear-ing in mind the potential of communities of care and the liberating powers of technology. With the right knowledge, skills, mentorship, financial resources and enabling policies, youth-led enterprises can grow economies and create job opportunities (AfDB, 2021[38]). Deliberate support for informal economic activities is

crucial, including the creation of opportunities to scale up and formalise these activities.

Finally, the future of Africa belongs to the young. Young people will keep migrating to cities in Africa and beyond. Whether "Waithood" is an opportunity or a threat depends on how it is managed. It behooves city governments to ensure that the urban experience for this demographic majority is safe, inclusive and economically rewarding.

H.E. Albert M. Muchanga

African Union Commissioner for Economic Development, Trade and Mining

The African Union at the centre of Africa's urban transformation for shared prosperity

The adoption of the Agenda 2063 in January 2015 in Addis Ababa by the 24th African Union (AU) Assembly of Heads of State and Government is a clear testament to African leaders' commitment to building a united, peaceful, sustainable, inclusive and prosperous society in the decades ahead. Agenda 2063, Africa's blueprint for socio-economic transformation, places urban planning at the centre of the continental drive towards a cohesive society, where every citizen plays a role and benefits from the wealth generated by this transformation. In this vision, urban planning is a catalyst for structural changes that will deliver stronger growth and generate quality jobs for all Africans, and especially for women and youth.

Between 2000 and 2016, despite the encroaching global environmental crisis, Africa enjoyed a period of unprecedented economic performance, with an average growth rate of 4.6%. Growth, however, has been limited to economic enclaves, without accelerating the hoped-for economic diversification that could address the structural challenges of poverty and inequality. Africa has fallen short of the 7% growth rate anticipated in Agenda 2063 that could catalyse prosperity on the continent, based on its immense natural resources.

Diversification of economic activity and a shift from subsistence agriculture towards productive sectors such as transformed agricultural, manufacturing and high-quality services are expected to drive this transformation. The need for urban strategic planning is also made more urgent by rapid and dynamic population growth that calls for appropriate policies. African Development Bank projections show that the proportion of urban residents is projected to shift from 40% of the total population in the 2000s to 50% and 65% in 2030 and 2060, respectively.

Agenda 2063 defines a clear path for positive outcomes in areas such as poverty, peace and security, prosperity, the environment and regional integration, all of which require strategic policies, programmes and projects for sustainable urban and human settlements.

The role of the African Union Commission in driving Africa's urban development agenda

The Commission's support for Member States aims to design policies and institutions that encourage urban growth and build social cohesion. Key policy focus areas include:

Designing and investing in sustainable and resilient cities.

Investing in sustainable cities offers an opportunity to address structural challenges that stand in the way of Africa's development. The Commission's work with Member States and regional economic communities consists of supporting the design and implementation of policies that increase urban growth and reverse the current trend of increased vulnerability and inequality. Policy support for sustainable urban planning focuses on land tenure and property rights, with the goal of increasing efficient urban growth and the capacity of institutions that govern property rights. This can help to accelerate Africa's productive transformation agenda. Managing rural-urban growth will be a catalyst for achieving Aspiration 1 of Agenda 2063 towards a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Africa is endowed with 60% of the world's arable lands. Allocating appropriate amounts of land to agriculture will be decisive in spurring Africa's agricultural transformation, with a view to feeding Africa's population and to becoming the breadbasket of the world in the coming decades. This can transform Africa's economies, through beneficiation of natural resources, manufacturing, industrialisation and value addition, as well as raising productivity and competitiveness. More importantly, economic diversification through accelerated industrial development will be crucial in creating the massive number of quality jobs needed for Africa's youthful population and to steeply reduce widespread poverty and inequality. Sustainable urban management will also be instrumental in strengthening existing regional value chains and designing new ones. Developing competitive, sustainable and inclusive agro-industries and agribusinesses in Africa can be a way to increase economic growth and food security.

Accelerating regional integration by better management of internal migration.

The free movement of persons and the right of establishment is one of the fundamental pillars of Africa's integration agenda for realising the African Economic Community. For the African Union Commission, ensuring the free movement of people and rights of

establishment will facilitate the supply of skilled labour from one country to another. The urbanisation agenda will facilitate the free movement of labour, and the obtaining of work permits for African citizens irrespective of their skills, religion, ethnicity and nationality. The Commission's work with Member States aims to revise national employment codes in line with Regional Economic Community (REC) protocols and to ensure that the rights of migrant workers in host countries are protected. Concerted action will harmonise national laws that conflict with regional treaties, and will address migrants' rights of residence and settlement. This requires modifying domestic laws, statutory instruments and administrative practices, and aligning national political interests with long-term regional goals and ambitions, which some Member States may not yet see as a priority.

Urbanisation will play a key role in accelerating regional integration. Increases in local and regional production and supply chains, as well as the transfer of goods, people and information, can better link local economies to their regional counterparts. Strategically planned urbanisation offers opportunities for higher levels of agglomeration and increased economic specialisation among countries. Meanwhile, increasing urban productivity and an increase in purchasing power will expand the opportunities for intra-African trade. Rapid urban population growth, higher urban density and diversification of economic activities will intensify spatial interactions, creating favourable conditions for regional integration.

Ensuring peace and security through sustainable urban growth.

Peace and security are prerequisites of the Agenda 2063. In recent years, land has become a delicate political issue. Such issues as property rights and fair distribution have become obstacles to peace and prosperity. In the years ahead, land management will accelerate conflicts if early preventive rural-urbanisation policy actions are not taken. Some ongoing disputes involve water, land and environmental degradation and call for strategic policy actions. Climate change will exacerbate these issues, resulting in rural-urban migrations and disputes over the allocation of vital spaces for housing, agriculture and pastoral purposes. The Commission's efforts to promote sustainable urban growth provide a basis for good governance and accountability in African countries. This is essential for building a cohesive society that works for the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense

of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility. To ensure peace and security in Africa as a precondition for inclusive and sustainable growth, the Commission will support Member States to establish mechanisms that prevent or immediately resolve intercommunity conflicts.

Encouraging environmental sustainability and enhancing resilience and risk reduction.

Environmental sustainability, enhanced resilience and risk reduction are key components of sustainable development, as encapsulated in Aspiration 1 of Agenda 2063. Africa's vision is to attain a situation in which natural resources are sustainably managed, societies consume and produce goods and services in a sustainable manner and biodiversity is fully preserved. Practices and new technologies to ensure efficient use of water resources and climate-resilient, low-carbon production systems will be put in place, to minimise the continent's vulnerability to climate risks and related natural disasters. As part of continental efforts towards environmental sustainability, African countries have signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the African Union has adopted a Programme of Action for the Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The urban dimension of both commitments is featured prominently in the New Urban Agenda, which notes that cities and human settlements face unprecedented threats. Unsustainable consumption and production patterns, loss of biodiversity, pressure on ecosystems, pollution, natural and human-made disasters, and climate change and its related risks, undermine efforts to end poverty in all its dimensions. Urban demographic trends can play a central role in mitigation and adaptation efforts related to climate change and in the use of resources and ecosystems. The way that urban areas are planned, financed, developed, built, governed and managed will have a direct impact on sustainability and resilience, well beyond urban boundaries.

Building urban governance structures.

Agenda 2063's approach to urbanisation calls for a human-centred development perspective that envisages the creation of a socially cohesive society. In this society, civic engagement will help to create a sense of belonging and ownership among all inhabitants, and the achievement of gender equality will allow women and girls to participate fully in all fields and in leadership roles, at all levels of decision making. People have a central role to play in implementing the

Agenda, and institutions and processes need to be set up to make this possible. The New Urban Agenda also recognises the role of urban and human settlements as collaborative platforms in which the public sector, private sector and civil society are engaged in working towards a common vision. Sound institutions and mechanisms will institute appropriate checks and balances that fully involve urban stakeholders. The New Urban Agenda makes a commitment to strengthen urban governance and broaden inclusive platforms, in line with national policies. Support is promised for subnational and local governments, as appropriate, in fulfilling their key role in strengthening the interface among stakeholders. Opportunities for dialogue will include age- and gender-responsive approaches enlisting all segments of society. Men and women, children and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and local communities, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants, regardless of their migration status, will be called on to participate, without discrimination based on race, religion, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

Edgar Pieterse

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Political implications of African urbanisation

It is well established that the African region demonstrates the highest rate of urbanisation. It is equally well-known that 90% of all urban growth will be concentrated in Africa and Asia between 2021-2050. Urbanisation over the next two decades will coincide with numerous challenging trends. They include rapid digital technological change that will shape the relative competitiveness of national and regional economies; more intense and more frequent climate-related disasters and pressures; the changing nature of work and occupational categories; and further bifurcation of polities as people gravitate towards various forms of extremism, combined with populism. All in all, it is a recipe for deep uncertainty and conflict.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given a foretaste of what these convulsions might mean in terms of everyday life, economic dislocation, political unrest and strains on precarious public infrastructure and institutions.[1] These exogenous stresses are likely to increase in frequency and impact, raising questions about the political-institutional reforms that should be considered to anticipate and respond pro-actively. In most African countries, given the long-term policy delay in advancing democratic decentralisation and the need to give National Urban Policies some teeth, several urgent institutional innovations could help equip governments prepare for what lies ahead.

Perpetually delayed reforms

Richard Stren, one of the longstanding observers of urban policy and governance, made the following observation 50 years ago:

> *One of the most widely held criticisms of urban policies in Africa is that they are inconsistent, haphazard, and not coherently articulated. … Physical planners rarely work with economists, there are no ministries of urban affairs, and even well-defined problems such as housing and urban transportation run the gamut of intra-governmental negotiations before anything serious can be attempted. The division of function and jurisdiction between local and central government also leaves a great deal of room for manoeuvre, conflict, and overlap in urban policy. (Stren, 1972[39])*

This assessment preceded the concerted policy push in the 1990s by various international development agencies for greater political and functional devolution of power from central governments to the local level. In the early 1990s, the push for decentralisation coincided with the proliferation of two discourses: environmental sustainability, which was to be reflected in Local Agenda 21 plans, and participatory development, which had to be embedded in institutional mechanisms at the municipal level, to give voice to civil society and citizens. Increasingly, in the late 1990s and 2000s, donor agencies in the multilateral system insisted on evidence of such reforms to access loan finance or debt relief. Amidst a larger wave of political reform to introduce multiparty electoral systems across Africa, various experiments in decentralisation were pursued, with uneven results (Pieterse and Smit, 2014[40]).

The literature on decentralisation concurs that decentralisation was often more hollow than substantial. Local governments were created in law, but these tiers of government were seldom awarded the requisite powers, functions and fiscal capacities to take control of their territories. Instead, they would be administrative extensions of national ministries, and most urban infrastructure and services would be planned, implemented and managed by national utility companies that bypassed local political processes. These institutional mismatches are allowed to persist, in part, because many national governments realised that their political foes would find their greatest electoral support in cities. This phenomenon creates a political incentive to keep local governments, especially in cities, weak and under-resourced.

National urban policies: A political game changer?

Against this historical backdrop, it is important to pay attention to the significant uptake of National Urban Policies (NUPs) in many African countries. According to the most recent data available, 23 African countries have NUPs, and a number of others are in the process of developing them (UN-Habitat, 2021[41]).

Since NUPs emerged as an institutional innovation, after the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, they have been seen as mechanisms to facilitate inter-governmental alignment around critical development, climate and economic development goals. In this sense, NUPs can become the policy arena that addresses how infrastructure investment for long-term and low-carbon growth is calibrated to respond to the territorial conditions of a given country. Put differently, a large-scale renewable energy strategy must

respond to where the greatest economic needs are—key regional hubs in a national hierarchy of places — and sequence investments to address capacity constraints in places with the greatest economic impact, whilst simultaneously promoting mini-grid, renewable energy technologies at a relatively low cost that can be operated by communities themselves.

The National Urban Policy can guide how best to implement such a spatially differentiated infrastructure investment agenda, whilst defining what it means for intergovernmental relations and fiscal policy. Furthermore, a NUP will present a view on how to optimise the alignment of critical infrastructure investments, and to ensure synergy and cost-effective alignment, within the larger perspective of addressing structural transformation of the economy through the promotion of green industrialisation (Lopes, 2019[42]). To be clear, this is the potential role that NUPs could fulfil in Africa. Whether they do so or not, remains unclear. It is too soon to draw conclusions.

New scales of co-ordination

An important dimension of the emerging new era is a recalibration of the scales at which economies and various forms of collective action are organised. The vulnerability of globalised value chains has been exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This realisation chimes with the environmental critique of long-distance supply chains. In response, the long-standing argument for a greater focus on regional scales of logistical organisation has come back onto the policy table, with important environmental and infrastructural dimensions. It is easier to optimise low-carbon mobility systems if the territorial scale of securing raw materials, conducting beneficiation, packaging and distribution are more contained in terms of physical extent. It is also easier to manage and co-ordinate scarce natural resources such as water when its planning and operational management is based on the regional water basins. New forms of energy provision, through renewable mini-grid systems, also lend themselves to smaller scales of organisation and distribution, rather than relying on national grids.

Regional economic competitiveness will increasingly rely on a deep understanding of the unique endogenous offerings of a given territory. It will also require building out the supportive infrastructure and labour market intermediation to enhance regional assets. Given the centrality of city-region economic hubs, especially in Asia and Europe, the new forms of city-region diplomacy and economic engagement are becoming increasingly important. African city-regions will have to come to terms with these imperatives and create the political and institutional scaffolding for formal forms of political organisation and networking to support moves in this direction. It is precisely these new imperatives for sub-national regional co-ordination and networking that should be addressed in contextual NUPs.

Another scale – the hyperlocal – will become increasingly important as urban service delivery and the underlying infrastructure shift towards technological approaches that enable low/zero carbon performance, material efficiency and labour intensity. This is particularly important in most African cities. Infrastructure systems and associated service delivery can be reimagined at the intersection of circular economy principles, digital technology, place-making imperatives and job-creation, through the strengthening of social enterprises within the affected communities. These opportunities are especially relevant in the poorest neighbourhoods of African cities, where various kinds of makeshift systems have been responding to the inability of the local state to provide affordable and consistent services. The challenge is to create new frameworks of engagement and negotiation, to rethink and redesign basic service delivery systems (e.g. electricity, water, sanitation, waste removal and housing provision), as well as services that structure common spaces through public space, green infrastructure and breathable air.

It is instructive to consider one illustration of how sanitation services can be reimagined not only to fulfil basic needs but also to comply with circular economy principles and enhance public health outcomes. It is based on research conducted by the Water Research Commission (of South Africa) and the Toilet Board Coalition. Figure 6.4 summarises the potential for reorganising the technological underpinning of sanitation in poor households, embedding digital sensors into the systems to generate vital preventative health data. The outputs from household and public toilets can feed into biological waste streams that can be processed to support agricultural economies. Not reflected in this is the need to strengthen social enterprises within such communities to maintain and operate these systems. This will reduce the cost for participating households and create opportunities for forms of work in a context where formal employment opportunities are scarce. Similar design logics can also be applied to other infrastructure sectors.

Figure 6.4. Recasting sanitation
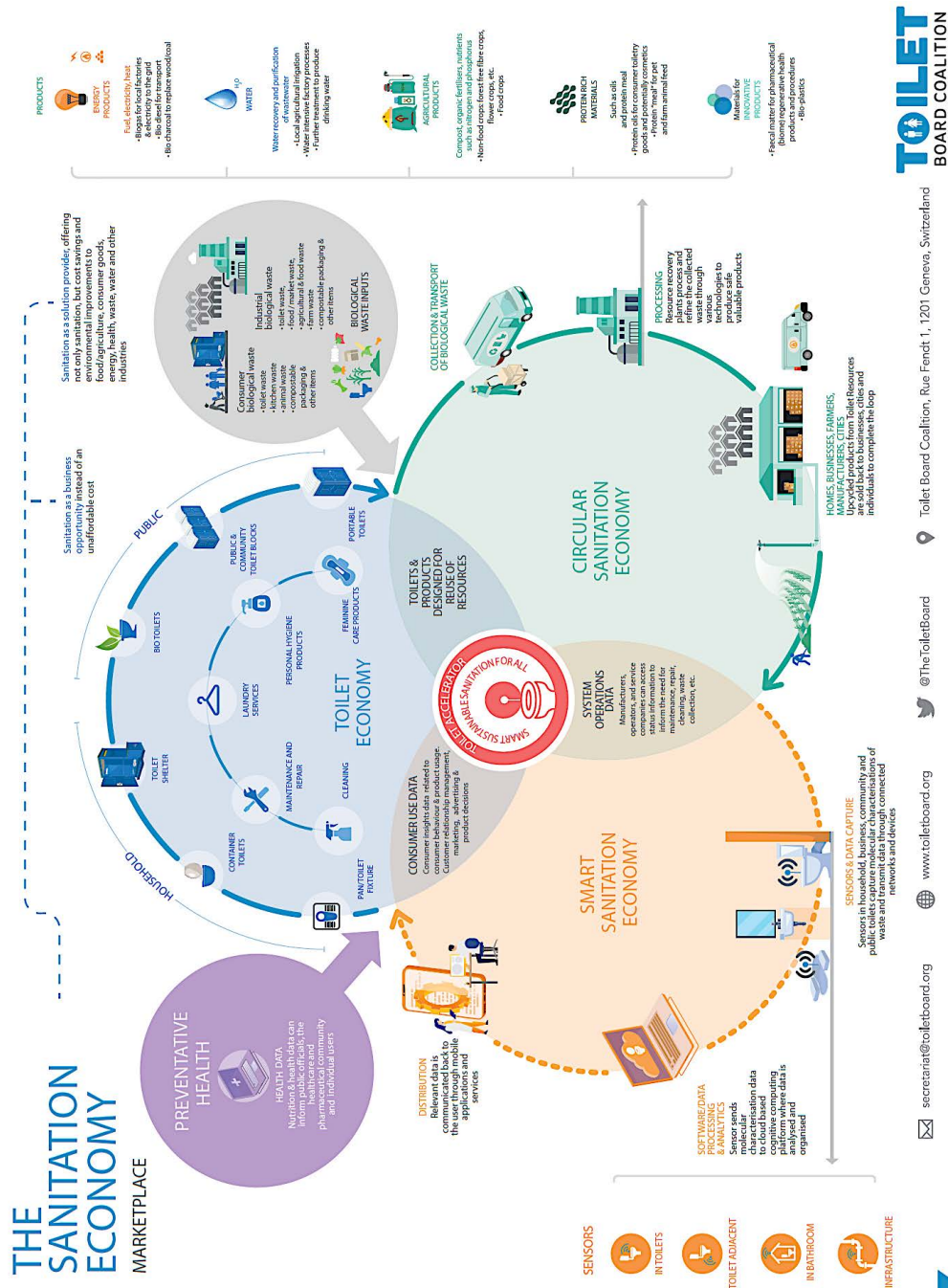
Bringing new politics to life through innovation

These new scales of development co-ordination must navigate an urban world that must contend with profound environmental risks and deep socio-economic inequalities. It is not a given that incumbent political actors will see an alignment between their own interests and experimenting with new forms of planning and co-ordination. It will be important for organised local government, in concert with civil society organisations, academia and the private sector, to establish forums where these new political and development opportunities can be discussed. National governments will be working to align SDGs commitments with their

National Determined Contributions, in terms of carbon reduction targets and green industrialisation strategies that align with the imperatives of the African Continental Free Trade Area. This may offer an opportunity for inclusive growth, jobs, reducing inequality and enhancing environmental sustainability. The difference from earlier perspectives on these inter-dependencies is that it is now understood that such an approach has profound spatial implications, especially in a context of rapid urbanisation.

It is for this reason that the importance of innovation systems must be appreciated. Innovation systems can be deployed to figure out how to adapt new technological and regulatory systems to the unique political and material challenges of African cities. Put differently, as intimated above, we have a reasonable sharp policy understanding of what needs to change, but the perennial question remains: How best to upend the status quo?

The dominant ways of doing things are held in place by powerful vested interests, entrenched behavioural patterns and preferences and institutional norms and sanctions that are difficult to shift because they have a basis in law and political power.[2] Apart from figuring out how to expose and shift the status quo, generic "solutions" will need to be adapted and tailored to specific contexts marked by unique socio-cultural and ecological dynamics and histories. New approaches and technologies must be adapted to local dynamics to have any hope of achieving traction, impact and durability. This raises the question: Who will do the work of matching innovative urban development ideas with local dynamics? City-level Experimentation Labs (CELs) can play this role.

Ideally, a local university-based urban research centre or think tank should take the lead to establish research and discussion platforms on pressing urban challenges in the local context. Such a nodal point will have to take on a variety of functions that include:

- *Foundational research* (collecting and analysing various datasets) to establish a credible evidence base on the various urban systems that underpin the urban- or city-region. Where resources allow, such incremental work should manifest as observatories with appropriate geospatial capacities and public interfaces.
- *Action research* on topics identified by key local actors in the public sector, civil society and the private sector, to ground and advance a medium- to long-term strategic plan co-produced in a par-

ticipatory fashion. This can dovetail with formal, statutorily required, territorial and environmental plans.

- *Translational research* that requires review and analysis of global (e.g. SDGs, New Urban Agenda), continental (Agenda 2063) and national development goals for application at the local scale. This task will help to reinforce the importance of local priorities and to refine the assumptions of implementation frameworks that stem from these larger policy imperatives.
- *Experimentation and prototyping* to uncover the practical mechanics of carrying out policy imperatives that stem from various generic frameworks in the areas of resilience, climate change adaptation, conflict resolution and so on. It is impossible to overstate the importance of testing new ideas, because most promising policy ideas run aground on regulatory and institutional mainstreaming.
- *Knowledge intermediation* through curated processes of co-production and exchange between diverse stakeholders in a city, or a specific area where action research or experimentation is being carried out. These processes are crucial to generate genuine innovation in relation to identifying solutions that can work effectively in the local context, appropriately adapted to reflect cultural sensibilities and unique conditions. (Parnell and Pieterse, 2015[44])

These functions imply that such urban research centres must incorporate diverse academic and professional skills to work within an open-systems frame that is fundamentally interdisciplinary. They also require a capacity for transdisciplinary practices, which involve the articulation and synthesis of academic, tacit, professional and intuitive knowledge. Transdisciplinary research is problem-driven interdisciplinarity conducted with, not for, societal actors.

Africa is undergoing a period of profound social, political, technological and demographic change that manifest most acutely in African cities and towns. The entrenched forms of political organisation and their logic of command and control are simply no longer appropriate, and new spatial dynamics are needed to define policies and strategies to contend with the challenges. A new generation of innovation capacity at the urban scale is needed, with the resources and trust to facilitate the necessary tough conversations on how best to transition to a more integrated, sustainable and just urban future.

Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr
Mayor of Freetown, Sierra Leone

Driving development? The challenge of making Freetown an engine of growth

Freetown's population is now estimated at approximately 1.5 million, an over tenfold increase since Sierra Leone's independence in 1961. During the civil war that engulfed the country in the 1990s, many fled towards the capital, where they began to build on pockets of land previously unused for housing – and the majority stayed. The city extended outwards to accommodate this influx, but it did not do so with any urban strategy or plan in place. Despite this lack of planning, two decades on, the city contributes more than one-quarter of the national gross domestic product (GDP), according to a 2019 World Bank report, reaffirming the importance of Freetown as a potential growth driver for the country.

Yet a lack of urban planning can lead to cities becoming bottlenecks for growth. This is a significant challenge facing the city. Despite Freetown's national economic importance, it is underserviced, overcrowded and vulnerable to natural hazards, challenges that are only going to grow in the coming decades, as Sierra Leone's population increases and climate change impacts are more keenly felt by residents. There is already a chronic shortage of affordable housing and land in the city, with recent estimates suggesting a housing deficit of 166 000 units, which could grow to 280 000 in the next two decades. A sizeable number of residents live in some of the more than 70 informal settlements of the city that are detached from basic services, often in at-risk areas that are prone to flooding.

Since I was elected as Mayor in March 2018, Freetown City Council has embarked on a concerted effort to make some inroads in these key areas. The Transform Freetown Agenda (2019-22), developed through an interactive consultation process, identified four priority clusters – resilience, human development, healthy city and urban mobility – through which our interventions are channelled.

Resilience captures three key areas – environmental management, revenue mobilisation, and urban planning and housing. Since 2019, we have worked closely with communities in informal settlements to identify and support efforts to improve their disaster preparedness capacity, particularly against the risks of annual flooding. We have also worked to improve the council's revenue generation, through efforts to establish a digitised, points-based property tax regime in the city. An initiative has been proposed to ensure that the tax burden is more equitably spread and that taxes are more efficiently collected; efforts that are projected to result in a fivefold increase in revenue, and which could support further improvements for urban residents. However, this initiative has been put on hold, first by a suspension of the property rate collection in 2020 by the central government, and more recently by internal institutional resistance.

Finally, whilst recognising that the challenges of urban planning and housing will require sustained intervention over the long term, we have undertaken efforts to upgrade informal settlements and to coordinate and improve planning standards and efforts. This will only be utilised if and when land use planning and building permit issuance is devolved from the Ministry of Lands to the local councils. The government's initiative to create a master's degree in urban planning at Njala University will also support these goals and can ensure that greater focus is given to this critical area.

Our focus on human development aims to create jobs, improve access to education, develop residents' skills and to specifically address the challenges facing those with disabilities across these areas. Many Freetonians rely on the informal economy for their daily income. Their livelihoods have been challenged by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which saw curfew measures introduced and limits imposed on the number of passengers in public and private transport. Creating formal jobs in the tourism sector – a sector that both the central government and the Transform Freetown Agenda had identified as a potential growth area – has also been severely hit by the pandemic.

Health, water and sanitation are the three key components of the third priority cluster of a healthy city. Improved access to services like the provision of water and effective waste disposal are key to developing a more supportive and enabling environment for citizens to flourish economically. Linked to this is the urban mobility cluster, where we are looking to decongest the central business district through ambitious public transport infrastructure projects like the Freetown Cable Car Initiative. Based on a review of comparable studies, the Freetown Cable Car system can act as an inclusive connector for underinvested communities in challenging terrain. Plans are also under way to regenerate the Central Business District, funded by a city-to-city partnership with the city of

Zurich (Switzerland). This funding will provide technical and financial assistance to a programme to promote walking through improvements to footways, reintroducing street lighting and controlled parking zones.

But for all of these areas of focus, the city council cannot succeed alone. We must work closely with central government ministries, departments and agencies to deliver coherent and joined-up interventions. This remains the biggest obstacle in the transformation of Freetown from a potential driver of growth to an actual driver of growth. As in many other cities across Africa, such as Dakar and Kampala, the political party representative elected to oversee the function of the city is not a member of the ruling political party. In Sierra Leone, where political loyalties and divisions are pronounced, this continues to cause roadblocks.

Despite the devolution of powers laid out in the 2004 Local Government Act, such measures have not always been undertaken. The relevant central government ministries – for example the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and Ministry or

Lands, Housing and Urban Development – are designated to provide overall policy direction. However, lack of dialogue, co-ordination and political commitment delay and hinder the effective implementation of proposed policies and decisions.

Increasingly, the Freetown City Council is driving a wide range of initiatives designed to boost the city's economic transformation. Planning is a fundamental part of any effort to develop a city, but in Freetown, it is impossible to do so effectively when politics influences initiatives. The consequences of this political stalemate are felt most forcefully by ordinary Freetonians, who are ultimately looking to the city for better services, reduced crowding and initiatives that can reduce climate vulnerabilities and improve economic opportunities. The potential remains for Freetown to become an engine of growth, but as with many initiatives in Sierra Leone, a failure to put plans into practice, especially urban planning and the issuance of building permits, continues to hold the city back.

Notes

1. For a sobering and nuanced reflection, see UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa (2021) *Analysing long-term socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 across diverse African contexts*, United Nations Development Programme, Johannesburg.

2. These dynamics are teased out elsewhere: Pieterse, E (2018[45]), "The Politics of Governing African Urban Spaces", *International Development Policy / Revue internationale de politique de développement*, No. 10, pp. 26-54, http://journals.openedition.org/poldev/2626.

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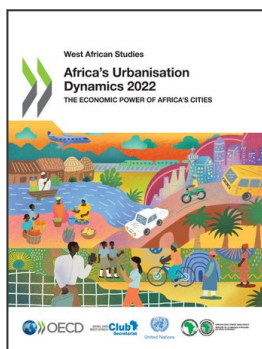
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