



Religious Urbanisation and Infrastructural Lives in African Mega-Cities (RUA Project)

RUA Working Paper No. 1 | December 2017

Urbanisation and Development: A Policy Review

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Contact: RuaProject@kent.ac.uk



Urbanisation and Development: A Policy Review

Abstract

This policy review summarises key documents relating to urbanisation and development that focus on cities in a global sense or on cities in developing countries, in Africa in particular. It discusses recent reports produced by a range of relevant stakeholders and international organisations such as UN-Habitat, the African Development Bank Group, The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa or the African Growth Initiative. The aim of this working paper is to examine the main policy issues and key discussions in relation to urbanisation and development and assess the extent to which the role played by a wide range of urban actors, in particular religious groups and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), is taken into consideration. This paper argues that within policy discourse, especially with regards to urbanisation and development in African cities, religious urbanisation lies awkwardly between an example of ‘legitimate’ infrastructural development, urban informalisation, social business-led development and innovative, community-based funding. Religious urbanisation is not a prominent feature of policy narrative but tends to appear as a disruptive or ‘complexifying’ influence.

Introduction

The important societal role that Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) and religious actors are playing in many developing countries has been recently acknowledged by a growing academic scholarship on the religion-development nexus (see Fountain et al 2015; Haynes, 2007; Tomalin 2015, ter Haar 2011). The policy literature also increasingly points to the strategic significance of recognising that FBOs have long been involved in development and stresses the need to avoid over-simplifying or stereotyping the role of religious organisations (UNFPA, 2014). Having established not only places of worship but also networks of educational or health facilities, clinics and dispensaries, these religious actors and institutions have radically reconfigured the urban and infrastructural landscape of many cities of the Global South, in particular in African countries. Taking as case studies Lagos and Kinshasa—two of the most populated and fastest growing cities in sub-Saharan Africa—the RUA project explores how these religious socio-spatial models and strategies engage with challenges of infrastructural development, urban social cohesion and inclusion, safety and sustainability.

In this working paper we examine the main policy issues and key discussions in relation to urbanisation and development and assess the place occupied by religious groups and FBOs in urban policy discourse. To do so the paper discusses recent reports produced by a range of key stakeholders and international organisations such as UN-Habitat, the African Development Bank Group, The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa or the African Growth Initiative. We show that the reports covered contain a relatively detailed and nuanced understanding of varieties of urbanisation, relations

between mega-cities and emergent intermediate cities, and ongoing urban-rural relations, but that such an understanding is largely filtered through models of development that are secular and economic in orientation. Thus, while a common aim in most reports is to indicate some of the specific features of African patterns and models of urban growth, very little attention is paid to the extent to which such patterns are driven by religiously-inflected strategies of urban planning and resource accumulation, deployment and redistribution. Religion is thereby excluded from a focused examination of links between urbanisation, development, and infrastructural production and maintenance. This lacuna raises questions that we intend to address in the RUA Project, not only through examining the role of non-state, religious actors in addressing issues of urban sustainability and expansion, but also through developing a methodology through which the on-the-ground activities of such actors can be assessed, and placed in dialogue with other forms of planning at various scales of operation.

New Urban Agenda

The first report analysed in this working paper is the *New Urban Agenda*. This report prepared by UN-Habitat (2016a) issues a declaration on ‘sustainable cities and human settlements for all’, written to establish critical connections to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, also written by the UN, and to ensure convergence between development agendas. With over half of the world’s population now living in urban contexts (with the proportion projected to grow) the document aims to leverage the agglomeration benefits of urbanisation and to ‘take advantage of the opportunities of urbanisation as an engine of sustained and inclusive economic growth’ (ibid.:1). The call to take advantage or *leverage the benefits of urbanisation* is a recurring theme in urban policy documents directed at the developing nations, and African nations in particular. Urban development is here understood as ‘a critical step for realising sustainable development’ (ibid.).

The *New Urban Agenda* aims to be inclusive and stresses the need for urban development that involves the participation of ‘all relevant actors’ including citizens, promotes civic engagement and nurtures co-operation to produce just, safe, healthy, accessible cities that foster prosperity and quality of life (ibid.: 2). Increasing co-operation and partnership working in urban planning and development is a recurring theme of many documents reviewed here. The *New Urban Agenda* emphasises the need to strengthen urban governance in a manner that empowers stakeholders but also includes ‘appropriate checks and balances’ to ensure urban development plans have greater coherence (ibid: 3).

The Agenda promotes inclusivity at all stages of the urban planning process. It encourages partnerships between government, local government and communities, civil society and the private sector (ibid.: 12). Religion is not mentioned explicitly but there is an acknowledgement of the role that culture plays in the revitalisation of urban areas, although the emphasis here is primarily on cultural heritage (ibid.: 6). There is recognition of the need ‘to promote culture and respect for diversity’ (ibid.: 5) to achieve the ‘humanisation of our cities and human settlements’ (ibid.). In addition, the document stresses a commitment to embrace diversity and to strengthen social cohesion, tolerance and intercultural dialogue in cities (ibid.: 7).

Urban development is argued to be central to endeavours to eradicate poverty (ibid.: 5). Inequality is also viewed as a key problem, with the persistence and growth of slums and informal settlements testament to this (ibid.). As such, spatial organisation, the design of urban space, infrastructure, service provision can promote or hinder social cohesion, equality and inclusion. Indeed, the *New Urban Agenda* is committed to promoting ‘equitable and affordable access to sustainable basic physical and social infrastructure for all, without discrimination’ (ibid.: 6). Housing is also deemed important. The agenda seeks to foster ‘the progressive realisation of the right to adequate housing, as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living’ (ibid.: 14).

Effective governance, accountable institutions, appropriate political and legal mechanisms and the availability of finance are highlighted in many places as critical to the implementation of the *Agenda*. These can, the report argues, be used to broaden inclusive platforms (ibid.:7). The document is especially supportive of the role played by sub-national and local governments in terms of ‘strengthening the interface among all relevant stakeholders’ and ‘offering opportunities for [non-discriminatory] dialogue’ (ibid.). Indeed, transparently organised multi-stakeholder partnerships are viewed as critical to successfully implementing urban development processes. International co-operation is also valued, especially the ‘sharing of best practices, policies, and programmes among governments at all levels’ (ibid.: 11). Multi-level consultation mechanisms are suggested as a means through which this may be facilitated and the *Agenda* is supportive of multilateral (ibid.: 19) but also ‘context-sensitive approaches in financing urbanisation’ and improving financial management capacities at all levels of government (ibid: 18).

In terms of scale, the *Agenda* promotes the development of urban spatial frameworks that support sustainable management of resources and land. It also promotes appropriate compactness and density, polycentrism and mixed uses (ibid.: 8). In response to extensive urban sprawl and the growth of informal settlements, the *Agenda* suggests the need rather for ‘planned urban extension’ or, even better, ‘infill’ strategies. Agglomeration is claimed to strengthen economies, resilience and sustainability (ibid.). Slums should be ‘upgraded’, providing high-quality buildings and public spaces, whilst avoiding socio-spatial segregation and gentrification (ibid.: 13). Social mix can be facilitated through the provision of affordable housing options and access to quality basic services (ibid.). In addition, increases in land and property value generated by development, infrastructure projects and public investments should be shared widely i.e. the benefits should be prevented from solely private capture (ibid.: 18).

The *Agenda* is committed to fostering healthy societies through inclusive access to quality public services (ibid.: 8). Education, skills training and educational facilities are stated as crucial to increasing economic productivity and to delivering innovative and competitive urban economies (ibid). The *New Urban Agenda* is also committed to adopting a ‘smart city’ approach that makes use of opportunities from technology and digitalisation in terms of enabling urban dwellers to make environmentally friendly choices, boosting sustainable growth and making cities more efficient in terms of service delivery (ibid.: 10). Such an approach is argued to enhance ‘citizen-centric digital governance’ (ibid.: 20).

Emerging Futures

Another important document produced by the UN-Habitat team is the *Urbanisation and Development: Emerging Futures document* (UN-Habitat, 2016b). This more lengthy and detailed report lays the ground for the declarations that the *Agenda* contains. The document is extensive and is too large to summarise in full here. As such, this review focuses on aspects most relevant for the RUA project.

Emerging Futures begins by commenting upon the twenty years of urban development occurring between Habitat II (1996) and Habitat III (2016). Cities are now operating on a radically different economic, social, and cultural ecology than the outdated model of the city of the 20th century, it is contended. The general narrative of the whole document is presented here in concise form:

[U]rbanisation fosters growth, and is generally associated with greater productivity, opportunities and quality of life for all. Cities generate wealth, generate employment and drive human progress by harnessing the forces of agglomeration and industrialisation. Cities also offer greater societal freedoms. In the process of urbanisation, however, there have been some bumps in the road [...]. Many rapidly growing cities keep sprawling, slums are expanding or consolidating, there is increasing poverty and sometimes inequality, cities can be very expensive for new migrants, crime can be rife in large cities, on top of which comes the contribution that cities make to climate change. (ibid: 4-5)

Urbanisation is held by the report to be a causal factor in itself, rather than the result of economic and social organisation (modes of production, relations of production etc.). It is argued to generate multiple forms of inequality, exclusion, deprivation which are spatialized, leading to divided cities characterised by gated communities and slums (ibid.: 5). Urbanisation also needs to be *kept in check*, it is suggested: by institutional and legal structures that promote more 'sustainable' models of urbanisation (ibid.). Poorly planned and managed urbanisation takes a precise and recognisable form: 'low densities, separation of land uses, mismatch between infrastructure provision and residential concentration, and inadequate public space and street networks' (ibid.). The report is clear that in light of their rapid growth, African cities are faced with serious funding problems that will hamper their ongoing development in the 21st century, especially in relation to providing adequate basic services and infrastructure (which in turn are critical to the economic performance of cities and providing a minimum quality of life to their citizens) (ibid.: 14). One reason for economic difficulties is relatively weak local tax collection (ibid.: 12). Access to infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa is uneven. *Emerging Futures* states that, out of necessity, urban residents in Africa find innovative ways to deal with the infrastructure challenge. Religious urbanisation, though not mentioned in the document, would fit into this category.

Inequality is noted as a crucial urban issue (ibid.: 17). The urban wealth divide both stigmatises and excludes. Large sections of urban populations are removed from a socially and economically productive life. As such, they have little opportunities for personal and collective advancement. Of the three main clusters of developing countries (Africa, Latin America, and Asia) Africa shows the highest levels of persisting urban inequality (ibid.: 18). Moreover, growing inequality has led to rising crime rates, which play a key role in the rise of gated communities in major African cities such as Johannesburg, Lagos, and

Nairobi (ibid.: 20). It will be interesting to assess whether (and how) religious urbanisation is also related to such socio-economic dynamics. *Emerging Futures* is unambiguous in arguing that urbanisation is a transformative force (ibid.: 27). This view is offered primarily, though not exclusively, in economic terms. For example, cities are viewed as critical as economic platforms for production, innovation and trade. Urban areas offer significant employment opportunities. As such, urbanisation is argued to help ‘millions escape poverty through increased productivity, employment opportunities, improved quality of life and large-scale investment in infrastructure and services’ (ibid.). Information and communications technology is believed to be playing an important role in the transformative power of urbanisation.

However, realising the gains of urbanisation is recognised to be difficult. The extent to which this is achieved depends upon how urban growth is planned and managed, and the extent to which the benefits of urbanisation are equitably distributed. As such, strategic urban planning is necessary to transform city form (ibid.). This can be interpreted as an argument for better management and renovation of slums and sprawl. Indeed, the document does later stress how ‘the reality of urban expansion and dispersal is evidenced in most cities, spurred not only by individual preferences for a suburban lifestyle, but also due to: poor land management and lack of regulatory control over peri-urban areas [...]’ (ibid.: 37).

In stressing the need for urban planning, *Emerging Futures* argues for a clear distinction between ‘a city that plans’ and ‘the planned city’ (ibid.: 121). The latter refers to cities based upon outdated modes of planning, especially those that reflect only national leadership, that have no local input and are riddled with nepotism. In particular, the report highlights how women are often excluded from urban planning processes and decisions. A ‘city that plans’, in contrast, listens to views of residents, employers, elected leaders and investors and works to integrate infrastructure, land-use, culture, natural resources, and education. Sprawl and subsequent density decline are argued to be the consequences of a lack of adequate planning and a problem that particularly affects developing countries. The ‘city that plans’ is argued to be an important part of a broader transition whereby planning ceases to be viewed as a modernist process, understood as a scientific, universally valid instrument of progress, and a new understanding that sees planning as a communicative process whereby planning becomes more politically engaged, inclusive, empowering, strategic, and integrated (ibid.: 123).

Emerging Futures highlights four policy directives to reinvent urban planning in this manner. The first is for integrated, multi-sectorial planning. The second is consideration of local circumstances, needs and requirements in addition to the greater involvement of local, diverse populations (especially in terms of providing women with greater say in planning processes). Third, urban plans need to be prepared at various geographic scales and integrated to support development and infrastructural needs across national and political boundaries. Fourth, in response to the lack of qualified individuals in the developing world, education and training for professional planners should be increased and capacity for planning education enhanced (ibid.: 121). Religion and issues of faith are not considered extensively or in detail in this document, apart from a few mentions of religion in the context of acknowledging the human diversity in cities.

The State of African Cities

Another crucial report to consider here is *The State of African Cities 2014: re-imagining sustainable urban transitions*, also prepared by UN-Habitat. As Myers (2016: 34) states, the general tone of this report is techno-managerial, suggesting that urban environmental woes could be effectively addressed with better policies, more efficient markets, and spatial planning. Myers also points to how the spiritual and symbolic realms of urban environments in Africa are underplayed. He argues that there is much more depth and complexity to the spiritual dimensions of Africa's cityscapes than UN-Habitat suggests in this document (ibid.: 37). However, the network of experts involved in writing the report does reveal considerable sensitivity and awareness of the complexities of local conditions (ibid: 35). As such, *The State of African Cities* 'can thus serve as the fullest statement yet of the voices of 'experts' on Africa's urban environments' (ibid.).

The report is highly critical of the way in which urban planning has performed across the continent, due to the heavy influence of 'the normative orientations of urban planning in the Global North' (UN Habitat, 2014: 11). As with *Emerging Futures*, a critique is made here of 'the planned city' and its clear inadequacies in an African context.

The earlier, 2010, version of *The State of African Cities* concluded that inadequate urban governance policies and low urban institutional capacities; high levels of inequality among different socio-economic population strata; as well as limited options for the poorer Africans to access urban land, all contributed to urban slum proliferation and would continue to do so, unless vigorously tackled. The 2010 report recommended the establishment of realistic and sustainable national urban development policies; enhanced urban management capacities within cities and towns of all sizes; better distribution of urban populations over different settlement-size classes; and significant improvements in broad-based access to urban livelihood opportunities. The 2010 report also advised that African governments should seek more balanced national urban hierarchies.

The 2014 document begins by projecting that by 2025 Africa's ten largest cities will include three megacities: Lagos (18.9 million), Cairo (14.7 million), and Kinshasa (14.5 million) (UN Habitat, 2014: 23). The 2014 report acknowledges how it is not only Africa's largest urban population concentrations that are becoming more prone to vulnerabilities and risks; these are actually increasing for all African settlements. Over recent decades, Africa has experienced a shift in the incidence and nature of insecurity, conflict, and violence. Inter-state violence has decreased but urban insecurity and violence have increased. The report warns that increased urban insecurity may have negative impacts on the international investment flows required for the sustained economic growth that could produce the urban-based employment that Africa's young people desperately require.

The report also points to how the urban poverty and urban slum proliferation of Africa's large cities is likely to become an even more widespread phenomenon under current urban development trajectories, especially given the continuing and significant shortfalls in urban institutional capacities.

However, the document notes that the bulk of urban population increases in Africa are now being absorbed by Africa's secondary and smaller cities and the lack of urban governance capacities in these settlements is likely to cause slum

proliferation processes that replicate those of Africa's larger cities. This concern is echoed in other recent policy documents relating to urbanisation in Africa. Although recent data indicates renewed growth strength among Africa's million+ cities, the vast majority of additional urban dwellers will live in intermediate and small cities. Consequently, the need for urban management, institution-building and system development is greatest in these smaller urban settlements (ibid.: 22). Many 'new towns' and satellite cities are emerging to relieve pressures on the largest African urban concentrations. Such developments will only intensify slum dwelling, the report states, because these developments almost exclusively cater for higher-income groups. As such, 'there is near certainty that these new towns will soon be surrounded by the informal accommodations of the low-income labour needed to service these new cities' (ibid.: 7). It will be interesting to ascertain whether examples of religious urbanisation in Lagos and Kinshasa are also having this effect.

Despite recent economic growth, Africa still experiences massive urban poverty and other social problems. The report states that the prevailing worldwide view that cities are engines of growth and human development may very well be challenged by unfolding realities in Africa (ibid.: 16). This doubt is significant. It is rarely expressed in policy documents—reviewed later—that are written from a predominantly economic perspective. *The State of African Cities* takes definitions of urbanisation very seriously. It is explained that urbanisation is a multifaceted concept that can refer simply to the growth of population in towns but it may also describe the social and political changes that may occur when people live in large, nucleated settlements. Urbanisation can also refer to two important structural changes. The first is the speed at which the urbanisation level (the share of the national population in towns) is increasing. The second is the extent to which the urbanisation level is accompanied by structural shifts in the economy and employment. This corresponds to conventional assumptions about the role of urbanisation in economic growth and development (ibid.: 22). However, the report states that *contrary to these assumptions*, it is possible to have one kind of urbanisation without the other; and this is the concern for Africa.

Distinguishing between these aspects of urbanisation helps to explain contradictory trends in sub-Saharan Africa. The most obvious of these is that rapid population growth does not necessarily translate into rapid increases in the urbanisation level. The reason for this is that rises in the level depend on how fast urban populations are growing relative to national growth rates. As many African countries have high population growth, the gap between national population growth and urban growth is not necessarily large, even if cities and towns are growing rapidly.

According to the report, the realisation of a pan-African approach to urban infrastructure and development remains elusive because many nations struggle with building their post-independence statehood. Although the number of democratically-elected African governments is now steadily increasing, many countries experience institutional and governance fragilities as well as challenges to state legitimacy (ibid.: 26). However, as Myers (2017: 40) contends, there is little consideration of the unequal colonial histories of infrastructure and service provisions that gave rise to the 'dualistic nature of urban development', producing distinct, yet interlocking, urban environments in many cities (Myers, 2017: 40). The report acknowledges that many post-independence African leaders were often derived from urban and westernized

elites and, as such, embraced political models inherited from Europe. The report suggests leaders largely ignored the notion that these models had evolved under different conditions in the West (UN-Habitat, 2014: 27).

Whilst *The State of African Cities* is not deeply critical of current Western market orthodoxies, it does concede that the Western political philosophies introduced in Africa failed to deliver the post-independence visions of development and prosperity. Although the report acknowledges how the global political and economic terrain acted against the interests of an emerging Africa, it places more significance in failures to augment political change and the lack of reform in political culture across (and within) the continent itself. In fact, the report states that African peoples have modernised faster than the political cultures in their nation states. Indeed, mobile technology and population mobility are re-enforcing demands for rapid change including rising political awareness; demands for more participatory governance and local self-determination; calls for transparency and accountability in the use of domestic finances. The report argues that the promotion of change in political cultures is implicitly embedded in the global drive for more decentralised governance.

Socio-economic development depends upon successfully managing the conflicts that inevitably arise in societies (ibid.: 30). Conflicts are most acute in cities where the needs, interests or grievances of individuals or groups are not addressed. In such instances, violence is more likely, which in turn represents an obstacle to social and economic progress. Religious urbanisation is an interesting example of development that may address the infrastructural needs of some at the expense of others. Whether it creates or ameliorates tension or conflict in cities is a critical issue to consider. The report is ambivalent about the influence of religion in African urban contexts. For instance, while the report stresses the positive impact of FBOs in terms of community cohesion, religious radicalisation is noted as playing a key role in generating conflict in African cities (ibid.: 40). In addition, it points to how religious conflicts are exacerbated by residential segregation. Moreover, the report states that autonomous religious zones exist within city slums and informal settlements that lie outside local and central government control. These are presented as examples of 'bad' decentralisation and include Bonaberi (Douala), Camp Luka (Kinshasa), Kanu (Abuja), Kibera (Nairobi), Soweto (Johannesburg) and the 'Jesus our Saviour' settlement in Lagos (ibid.: 40). The degree to which religious urbanisation produces spaces outside of control of formal authorities presents a problem for development, security and social cohesion in African cities.

The report has a consistent message regarding 'institutional fragility' across African cities (ibid.: 35). Key outcomes of institutional fragility include fragmentation between different spheres and levels of governance; inefficient and unresponsive bureaucracy; a lack of appropriate decentralisation of decision-making; high levels of corruption, political cronyism and nepotism; high risks of private sector coercion, coupled with a lack of skills, technologies and organisational cohesion that are required to deliver infrastructure and development needs successfully (ibid.).

The report is sensitive to sub-regional contexts. In Western Africa, for example, it is stated that the emerging urban middle classes are key to sustaining growth and foreign direct investment (ibid.: 9). However, it is also reported that poverty, informality and inequality have become intensified in cities in the sub-region. Slums and informal service provision, trade and employment also persist as a central feature of Western African cities. The

high proportion of unemployed urban youth is a major cause for concern. Consequently, support for youth employment, education, entrepreneurship and innovation, skills development, vocational training and apprenticeship programmes will play a major role in stabilizing this demographic (ibid.: 10).

The report highlights how state systems and bureaucracies are inadequate in dealing with public demand for services, whether these are infrastructural or public goods. As such, informal and private sector provision fills this vacuum (ibid.: 10). With large proportions of the urban population still residing in informal settlements and slums, the ability of local authorities to collect and maintain revenues is low. In addition, a lack of urban infrastructure hampers sub-regional economic growth and development. Key regional infrastructure deficits exist in logistics and transport, port infrastructure, information and communications technologies (ICT), and energy. However, it is reported that regional agencies such as the African Development Bank are funding infrastructure development. China is playing a key role in road, rail and port infrastructure development projects (ibid.: 10).

Culturally, the sub-region's cities are characterized by new dynamics that negate the cosmopolitan traditions of Western Africa and instead retreat into a combination of ethnic, territorial, Muslim and Christian fundamentalist and evangelical transnational groups. Indeed, ethno-religious contestation in Nigeria between Islamic and Christian groups, for example, has resulted in bloody confrontations in the autonomous 'Jesus Our Saviour' quarter in Lagos (ibid.: 129). *The State of African Cities* highlights the role played by local and transnational spiritual organisations in urban governance, but stops short of identifying them as agents, or as key actors in urbanisation itself. It describes how faith-based organisations and neighbourhood associations, whether local, national or international (i.e. global cross-congregational religious movements and associations), are sources of community cohesion; psychological and emotional counselling; spiritual healing and charitable work. Such groups are influential in the daily lives of Western African urban residents, as seen in neighbourhoods such as 'Jesus Our Saviour' in Lagos, Nigeria (ibid.: 132). The report voices concern however, as to whether these groups/spaces contribute to the fragmentation of the city along religious lines by locally enforcing their own laws (ibid.).

Urban fragmentation in Western Africa may be following ethnic or religious lines, but ultimately this is determined by income level distributions. Moreover, the absence of the state from the public sphere is striking in the sub-region's cities, except the pervasive and often corrupt police presence that employs its own version of informality by collecting bribes and favours from the public. The state does not serve as an administrator and regulator of public affairs in any meaningful measure. Where the state retreats from the public sphere, other actors perform the functions that society requires and, consequently, new independent social forms of order emerge, including those organised on religious lines. Even though these may be considered 'informal', they actually represent the majority frameworks through which urban governance is socially administered. In this sense, informality can attain a greater claim to legitimacy than the state (ibid.). Where religious urbanisation fits in terms of questions of 'legitimacy' is a fascinating question to consider.

In Central Africa, it is stated that with an estimated population of over 9 million, Kinshasa continues to dominate the sub-region as the largest and fastest growing urban system. Kinshasa is set to become Africa's third mega city before 2015 (ibid.: 11). Kinshasa provides annually for around 390,000 new

citizens and is projected to become home to 14.5 million inhabitants in 2025. Kinshasa also has vast, outward-sprawling slums and informal settlements (ibid.: 188).

Capital cities in the region tend to function as hubs for international financial transactions as well as command posts for the management of multinational organisations. Mass investments in infrastructure, in the service sector and in the tourism industry have helped to lower the rate of unemployment in some of the sub-region's cities. However, most urban economies in the sub-region have started to struggle as they depend heavily on the export of mining, especially the exploitation and export of copper, diamond, oil, and timbers. Although globalisation and new technologies have significantly changed the way cities in Central Africa trade with the outside world, trade *within* the sub-region remains low, due to lack of road and railway infrastructure. The demand for more regional integration is great.

Although Central Africa is rich in oil, minerals, water, forest and biodiversity, cities in the sub-region are characterized by deep poverty and widening inequality, corruption, as well as a high proliferation of slums and informal settlements. Living conditions in Central African cities have been deteriorating for many years. Increased urban poverty in the region has economic, social and institutional dimensions and it is the result of dictatorship, corruption and decades of negative growth throughout the region (ibid.: 12). Moreover, urban governance in Central Africa is beset by deep institutional failures. Recent decentralisation policies have led to additional urban governance problems with municipal institutions not reaching the poor due to inefficiency, over-bureaucratisation, corruption and nepotistic practices that give preference to the wealthy and politically connected. Municipalities are often unable to collect revenues to finance their services. Private developers cater for the wealthy and the lack of formal service provision renders poor households vulnerable to the increasing costs of water, energy, transport and food (ibid.: 11). Slums and informal settlements have generated large 'autonomous' zones where lack of formal governance is met by informal systems of self-regulation (ibid.: 201).

The report states that urban culture and identity in Central African cities is characterized by high religiosity, a significant youth cohort, circular urban-rural migration, and long histories of conflict. Ethnic segregation persists in Central African cities. One further problem is that there are few platforms where youth can voice their condition, desires and hopes. Women are also identified as crucial social actors in shaping the urban future of the sub-region, yet support for the advancement of women in society is limited (ibid.: 12). Even with the constant threat of displacement and eviction, the poor still seek the possibility of living in a modern city that is globally connected because there is a widespread longing for the right of inclusion in global society that goes beyond the desire for inclusion in the city locality itself (ibid.: 218). It is important to consider how in cities with high levels of religiosity, notions of 'global society' and modernisation are tied or related to the church.

The report argues that further key issue in Central African cities is pervasive corruption. Despite the existence of formal institutions in name, these often remain less accessible than informal arrangements. In Kinshasa, violent clashes have occurred because of urban management fragmented between formal and informal systems and between municipal and decentralised provincial authorities (ibid.: 203). Years of prolonged failure in urban services delivery are driving down the living standards of the majority urban dwellers in the sub-

region. Despite the abundance of national wealth, many Central Africans have been deprived of basic services for decades. Access to electricity, clean water and sanitation remain critical issues in the sub-region.

Poor quality education in Central Africa is also of concern, especially at secondary and tertiary levels where the situation is worsening. Public schools and universities have not been repaired, while furniture and school equipment are often no longer renewed. With little or no income, poor and low-income parents often sacrifice their children's education (ibid.: 218). Unemployment is a problem in the sub-region (ibid.: 219). In addition, urban dwellers in Central Africa are heavily employed (or self-employed) in the informal sector. Those employed informally often engage in multiple trade and labour activities within their opportunity space, enabled through networks of kinship, religion, clan and community.

The report argues strongly for a new 'Urban Development Paradigm' (ibid.:42). Until the 1960s, urbanisation was largely associated with human progress and 'modernisation', with urban and regional planning at the heart of development strategies and development aid. However, in the late 1970s there was a profound shift whereby cities were portrayed as parasitic islands of privilege. Urbanisation in many developing regions, including Africa, was viewed as socially destructive and an obstacle to economic development. Consequently, international support for urban development initiatives waned in the 1980s and 1990s, which saw governments adopt policies to restrict rural-urban migration. Investment in rural areas was justified by arguing it would reduce urban poverty by encouraging people to stay away from urban slums. However, such strategies had little discernible impact on urbanisation in the region. As the report explains, the anti-urban turn in development theory coincided with the emergence of a neoliberal paradigm that emphasized the primacy of markets (as opposed to states) in stimulating and sustaining economic development. Across the Global South, governments were actively encouraged—and even coerced through structural adjustment programmes—to cut public expenditure, privatize state assets and scale back public regulation. In this atmosphere, urban and regional planning was generally side lined despite unprecedented growth rates of Africa's urban population.

The report concludes (ibid.: 44) that planning theory has previously been too focused on removing informal development in African cities rather than identifying and rectifying segregationist practices (which may, of course, include religious urbanisation). The rate and scale of urbanisation in Africa requires a balance between embracing informality while planning for sustainable service delivery. As such, there needs to be a reimagining by scholars and development practitioners as to what constitutes a 'city', since the Western concept is no longer the sole legitimate template for its application in Africa. The authors of *The State of African Cities* thus call for 'a radical re-imagination of African approaches to urbanism' (ibid.: 7).

Infrastructure, Cities and Urban Development

The African Development Bank Group (ADBG) Urban Development Department produced a report titled *Infrastructure, Cities and Urban Development* in 2016. The report is important because ADBG are major investors in infrastructure projects across the continent. The report raises concerns that industrialisation on the continent is low, and its growth is key to fully unlocking Africa's

potential. At the heart of industrialisation is the requirement for an efficient and cost-effective transport and logistics system that ensures seamless movement of commodities and products along a value chain (ADBG, 2016: 7). It is argued that improved regional integration is a pre-requisite for addressing the challenges that come with Africa's smaller and fragmented economies.

ADBG reaffirms its commitment to improving the quality of life. The report argues that the Bank's investments in transport have always placed poverty reduction and improvement of people's lives as principal motives. The investments have taken various forms, including direct improvements in urban infrastructure (ibid.: 8). Specific examples include railway infrastructure reinforcement, integrated transport programs, bridge construction and an optical fibre backbone for the Trans-Sahara region (ibid.: 11).

The report agrees that Africa is faced with rapid urbanisation, and it is estimated that by 2050 nearly 50% of the population will be living in cities. This is expected to exert pressure on existing infrastructure and if not properly addressed could lead to unliveable and uncompetitive cities that are unable to provide urban populations with access to jobs, social services, and means of economic production (ibid.: 8). Once again the prospect of urbanisation without structural change is raised as a concern.

Urbanisation and Industrialisation for Africa's Transformation

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) has produced the document *Urbanisation and Industrialisation for Africa's Transformation: Economic Report on Africa* (UNECA, 2017). This major and informative work aims to provide a strategic policy framework to enable African countries to harness urbanisation for industrialisation (ibid: xix). The report begins by claiming—not without justification—that Africa is now the epicentre of global urbanisation (ibid.: xx). However, rapid urbanisation has profound implications for Africa's growth and transformation. The rate and scale of urbanisation is reshaping not only the demographic profile of the continent but also economic, environmental and social outcomes. Urbanisation increases demands for employment, services and infrastructure, but also creates advantages for economic growth.

Africa's rapid urban growth is presented here as both an opportunity and a challenge. UNECA argues that while the prevailing narrative has focused on the negative externalities of the urbanisation of Africa, there is now an increasing recognition of its potential to drive much needed growth and structural transformation.

However, the evidence is that urban and industrial development in Africa is currently less connected than they should ideally be, resulting in lost opportunities for job creation and improved well-being. Africa's cities are crippled by severe infrastructure and service gaps. As such, reconnecting urban and industrial development in Africa through deliberate policies, strategies and investments must become a priority for the sustainability of both cities and industries. The report states, 'Cities require better performing industrialisation and industrialisation requires better functioning cities. At the same time, industrialisation and urbanisation face common challenges' (ibid.). The core message of the report is that more effort is needed in the context of national development planning to link urban and industrial development (ibid.).

Four key policy anchors can enable African countries to better leverage urbanisation for accelerated industrialisation (ibid.: xviii). The first is to respond, through domestic manufacturing, to rising demand and shifting patterns of consumption generated both as the result of urban population growth and rising incomes in cities. The second anchor is for industrial policy to factor in the ways urban functionality can support or hinder the productivity of firms. The functionality of cities and the connections between them should be planned to support specific targeted industrial sectors. A third anchor should be strategically directing and prioritizing investments and interventions in order to leverage the advantages of urban centres for industrial development. The fourth anchor is to integrate industrialisation in urban and regional policies. Industrial targets should be a foundation and a guiding force for urban planning and spatial policies (ibid.).

The report states that the primary target of structural transformation is to shift labour out of low-productivity agriculture into higher-productivity manufacturing and modern services (ibid.: xx). Currently, African cities face low productivity, low job creation, high informality, huge infrastructure and service gaps, weak linkages with rural areas, high levels of informality, increasing inequalities, growing environmental damage and vulnerability to climate change and weak institutional systems and capacities. Unless resolved, the report argues, these impediments will undermine Africa's urban potential for structural transformation (ibid.). The challenge then, is to harness urbanisation to promote economic diversification. Industrialisation, the report confidently states, will create jobs, enhance access to basic services and reduce inequality and poverty (ibid.). Again, here is the dichotomy between urbanisation as a geographical and social phenomenon (a proportion of an overall population) and urbanisation as structural transformation.

According to this economic report, the links between urbanisation and industrialisation have generally been weak or absent in Africa. Africa has and is currently experiencing urbanisation without making sufficient progress towards industrialisation (ibid.). Where links do exist, these have often developed organically rather than through deliberate policy responses. The challenge for Africa is thus to transform its economic growth into sustained and inclusive development by harnessing urbanisation to promote economic diversification, with a special focus on the kinds of industrialisation that creates jobs, reduces inequality and poverty, and enhances access to basic services (ibid.: 172).

The report suggests that future policies address what is identified as an 'urbanisation-industrialisation nexus' (ibid.: xxi). The report is unequivocal that the urban demand created by a new urban middle-class can be the driver of industrial development. It states that urbanisation influences industrial development in multiple ways. Nurturing middle-class consumption is viewed as an urban-based project. As income grows, discretionary spending increases and consumption patterns change, generating demand for manufacturing goods and urban construction and thus creating opportunities for African industry (ibid.: 94). Urbanisation therefore presents a major opportunity for industrialisation through rising urban demand and shifting patterns of consumption (ibid.: 98). In the context of a declining public sector, there is, however, little here to suggest *how* an urban middle-class may be cultivated in African cities, apart from via the increased industrial production that they themselves are viewed as the catalyst for expanding. Many African countries have a high degree of urban primacy, the report suggests i.e. the largest city is too large, there are few large or mid-sized cities, and smaller cities are *too*

small. The report highlights the benefits of well-balanced and functioning *urban systems* for industrial development. It argues that a diverse urban system can offer industrial firms a variety of locational choices to meet their disparate locational needs. Regional integration also offers opportunities for further leveraging momentum of cross-border urbanisation for industrial demand. Polycentrism is therefore preferred to outwards sprawl from the largest cities. The report urges strategic thinking, arguing that today's policy decisions for urban design and infrastructure will have a long-term lock-in effect and thus shape the development path of Africa's cities (ibid.: xxii).

The report identifies familiar barriers to well-functioning cities such as dysfunctional land markets, poor mobility, inadequate infrastructure, social segregation and poor urban form. Urban dysfunctions are partly to blame for the high costs of living and working in African cities. Policies to address these issues have so far been inadequate (ibid.: xxii). Undermining the potential benefits of agglomeration economies in cities are weak institutions, a lack of infrastructure (and inequitable access to infrastructure) and unplanned urban form. African cities are becoming simultaneously less dense and more segregated. They lack basic infrastructure and services, and they are shackled by poor mobility (ibid.: 173).

In concluding, UNEC state that Africa's rapid urbanisation is a powerful asset for structural transformation, but *only* if it is harnessed by a strategic cross-cutting policy framework (ibid.: 173). As such, policies should expressly target subsectors of urban-driven domestic and regional demand, fostering value addition and job creation by developing domestic manufacturing and services. They should also stimulate agricultural productivity, another key factor in structural transformation (ibid.). National urban systems are required to accelerate industrial development. Increasing industrial production and domestic, regional and global trade requires a system of cities that are functionally and spatially connected. Regional *systems of cities* are important to provide subsectors with locational options that meet their preferences. Competitive secondary cities can catalyse industrial development by linking manufacturing and urban markets to rural areas and regions with agricultural and natural resource potential (ibid.). The report does not consider issues of religion or faith in understanding the urbanisation-industrialisation nexus.

Foresight Africa

The Brookings Institution and the African Growth Initiative combined to produce a major report titled *Foresight Africa: Top Priorities for the Continent in 2016*. The report states the top priorities for Africa and aims to promote a dialogue on the key issues in influencing economic development in Africa in 2016 (ibid.: 6). The Brookings Institution, a centrist/ liberal US think tank based in Washington, argue—like UNEC—that urbanisation must be 'capitalised upon' to jump-start industrialisation in Africa. They report how the African population's rapid move to cities is quickly creating megacities and huge population growth in intermediate cities. Crucially—and worryingly—this is occurring before officials have the chance to implement good policies or finance robust infrastructure to support their inhabitants (ibid.: 3). As such, most new urban residents are likely to live in slums, with inadequate access to electricity, sanitation and clean water (ibid.).

The report suggests that economic growth momentum in the region may be running out of steam (ibid.: 6). Growth in the largest economies in the region, Nigeria and South Africa, is also slowing down (ibid.: 11). The two countries together account for more than half of the region's GDP. To put this in perspective, if Africa could regain its 2004-2014 per capita GDP average growth rate, GDP per capita could be doubled by the year 2036. In contrast, at a growth rate of the predicted 1.4 percent, this achievement would take place in 50 years, by the year 2065 (ibid.: 6). As such, it is crucial that Africa achieves 'faster' and 'better-quality' economic growth, incorporating a high growth elasticity of poverty reduction (the percentage reduction in poverty rates associated with a percentage change in mean per capita income) and relying upon a more diverse set of engines of growth, such as agriculture and manufacturing in addition to exports of oil and other commodities (ibid.).

According to the report, Africa faces a 'triple threat' from the changing global environment: (1) prices of Africa's main exports, oil and metal, have fallen significantly; (2) the economy of Africa's main bilateral trading partner, China, is slowing down; and (3) external borrowing costs are increasing and the options for borrowing are becoming more limited (ibid.: 9).

Poverty rates have continued to fall across the continent. Substantial progress is also recorded in other dimensions of human development, especially in health and personal security (ibid.: 40). Since the mid-1990s, life expectancy at birth has risen by 6.2 years, and the prevalence of chronic malnutrition among children under 5 fell by 6 percentage points. Deaths from politically-motivated violence has declined. Tolerance and the incidence of gender-based domestic violence has declined, and scores on voice and accountability indicators have risen slightly. Progress in the aggregate has come along with progress on the ground it is argued.

However, despite the drop in the poverty rate, given Africa's rapid population growth, still many more people are poor today (ibid.: 41). Even under the most optimistic estimates of poverty from 2012, this number is approximately 330 million compared with 280 million in 1990. Projections also show that the world's poor will continue to be increasingly concentrated in Africa.

Levels of achievement in human development remain low across different domains including literacy, health, violence against civilians, and tolerance of domestic violence (ibid.). Overall, the report argues that three patterns are key (ibid.). First, fragile countries tend to perform worse. Second, there is a human development penalty to residing in a resource-rich country (the political economic dimensions of which are not explored thoroughly in this report). Finally, better-educated women and their children do decisively better across a range of indicators.

Fragile states continue to be a major problem (ibid.: 62). Fragility is defined as an imbalance between the strains and challenges (internal and external) faced by a state and society and their ability to manage them. The report states that out of the 17 fragile states in the region only four of them (São Tomé and Príncipe, the Republic of Congo, Sudan and Côte d'Ivoire) are not low-income countries (ibid.).

In relation to urbanisation, the report asserts that cities have not yet been integrated into the political discourse. Neither the current trend for 'compact' and 'smart cities' or continued informalisation and sprawl are likely to benefit African cities, so states the report. Rather, future development needs to be

less ‘off-the-shelf’ and have a clear idea about the typical African city dweller in mind. The current climate of political renewal, the report suggests, can be used to lay the foundations for reflection on the African cities of tomorrow, recognising the role of cities in developing countries while appreciating the richness and diversity of existing African cities (ibid.: 67).

The report stresses the crucial contribution to be made by good governance to progress in Africa, including democratisation (ibid.: 76). The quality of governance in sub-Saharan Africa varies wildly according to the report (ibid.: 78). In fact, having a large economy does not necessarily go together with maintaining ‘good governance’. The examples provided in this regard are Nigeria and South Africa. Moreover, low-income countries like Ghana perform well on the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance. Similarly, when we look at the fastest-growing economies, we also see a wide variation in governance scores. The report does not consider issues of religion and faith in relation to urbanisation or development.

Sustainable Cities and Structural Transformation (African Economic Outlook)

African Economic Outlook 2016: Sustainable Cities and Structural Transformation is an important and extensive report produced in collaboration by the African Development Bank, the OECD Development Centre and the United Nations Development Programme (ADB/OECD/UNDP). The focus of this report is again the disjuncture between urbanisation and structural development. The editorial states that turning Africa’s economic resilience into better lives for Africans requires strong policy action to promote faster and more inclusive growth (ADB/OECD/UNDP 2016: 5). To achieve the development objectives set by African institutions and the international community, African countries must deepen structural and regulatory reforms, foster macroeconomic stability, and tackle power supply bottlenecks.

In relation to the special theme of report—cities—it is stated that Africa’s urban transition offers historical opportunities for improving economic and social development, while also increasing protection of the environment. For instance, connecting urban markets to rural economies could increase productivity of agriculture and raise non-farm incomes. The editorial acknowledges how accelerating investment in urban infrastructure is critical if African cities and towns are to become engines of structural transformation at local, national and regional levels. Bold political reforms are needed to capitalise on a so-called ‘urbanisation dividend’, including tailoring urban strategies to specific contexts, harnessing innovative financing instruments, and strengthening ongoing efforts to promote efficient multi-level governance.

The *African Economic Outlook 2016* shows that the continent is performing well in regard to economic, social and governance issues and has encouraging prospects for the near future (ibid.: 18). It is suggested that domestic factors have underpinned Africa’s resilience:

On the supply side, in countries where weather conditions were favourable, agriculture boosted growth, but droughts or floods slowed down growth in countries in East and Southern Africa. In resource-rich countries, growth slowed down as lower commodity prices strained government budgets and affected investment. Manufacturing activity improved in a few countries but was limited by persistent power shortages. On the demand side, private

consumption and construction investment remained the main drivers of growth, reflecting relative insulation from external shocks. However, weak global demand curtailed growth of Africa's exports, especially minerals and oil, and terrorist attacks and general security problems in some countries adversely affected tourism (ibid.).

However, while African countries have steadily progressed in enlarging people's choices in education and health and in improving living standards, the current pace of improvement is insufficient (ibid.: 20). Progress is hampered by several factors: inequality weakens the impact of growth on poverty reduction; weak structural transformation limits work opportunities; and limited advances in gender equality hamper skills and entrepreneurial development (ibid.: 91).

Africa's urbanisation contributes to human development gains but these are not equally distributed. Thus, addressing urban poverty should be an integral part of new urbanisation strategies. Moreover, underlying tensions between social groups caused by economic, political and social exclusion can be overcome by ensuring that citizens have secure livelihoods and access to quality services. Governments must also work to enhance security, promote human rights and protect the most vulnerable (ibid.: 18).

The report is clear that urbanisation provides opportunities to accelerate social development in Africa in different ways (ibid.: 209). First, urbanisation could improve material well-being through higher disposable incomes for food, shelter and investment in human capital which enhances one's potential for generating income. Second, agglomeration enables economies of scale in delivering indivisible public goods such as transportation and communication systems. Third, densification creates a web of interconnected community groups and stakeholders in cities which can engage in governmental poverty alleviation programmes, or grassroots social development initiatives. Religion or faith-based organisations are not explicitly mentioned in relation to this.

The report highlights how remittances continue to represent a key source of capital for African countries (ibid.: 63). Of an estimated 23.2 million migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, 26% live in OECD countries and 65.6% in Africa (ibid.). The largest home countries of migrants were Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Somalia, and Sudan. Africa itself hosts 18 million migrants, with the majority going to Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. Developed countries dominate remittances to Africa, but African countries like Cameroon (USD 2.4 billion in 2015), Côte d'Ivoire (USD 1.3 billion), and South Africa (USD 1.1 billion) transferred large remittances to other African countries. Four countries account for nearly half of remittances sent to Africa: the United States (USD 8.4 billion), Saudi Arabia (USD 8.3 billion), France (USD 6.9 billion), and the United Kingdom (USD 5.2 billion) (ibid.). Bilateral remittances to Africa amounted to USD 63.8 billion in 2015. Low-income countries such as Liberia, Gambia, Comoros, and Lesotho received the largest amount of remittances as a share of GDP (ibid.). Remittances to African countries are unevenly distributed, with North African (49.5%) and West African (40.8%) countries receiving the bulk of flows in 2014 (ibid.: 64).

The report claims that the magnitude and speed of urbanisation in Africa and Asia represents the second major wave of urbanisation in the history of humankind (ibid.: 146). The first major urbanisation wave took place in Europe, North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean between 1750

and 1950, when the urban population increased from 15 million to almost 462 million. The current wave of urbanisation is bigger and faster. An additional 2.1 billion people are projected to be living in African and Asian cities between 2016 and 2050 (ibid.).

The report is also helpful in terms of key definitions (ibid.: 149). It states that urbanisation differs from urban population growth. 'Urbanisation' is the increase in the share of a country's total population living in urban areas. Deep changes accompany this increase, notably economic, social, and environmental ones. 'Urban population growth' is the absolute growth in a country's urban population. A country does not urbanise when urban population growth is lower than rural population growth (ibid.). The report defines a 'megacity' as an urban agglomeration with a population of 10 million people or more, and a 'megalopolis' as a large agglomeration of adjacent urban centres. An 'urban corridor' links cities of different sizes through transport and economic axes (ibid.).

An important finding not adequately explored in other policy documents is that Africa is urbanising so quickly because towns and intermediate cities are growing. Between 2000 and 2010, urban agglomerations with fewer than 300 000 inhabitants accounted for 58% of Africa's urban growth (ibid.). Between 2010 and 2030, the small agglomerations are forecasted to make up 51% of the urban growth; the intermediate ones 16%; and the biggest 33% (ibid.). Africa's fast pace of urbanisation requires massive investment in infrastructure. The report suggests that governments and the private sector must invest twice as much by 2050 as they have since the years of independence (ibid.: 177).

Africa's fast pace of urbanisation and urban growth contrasts with the slow pace of structural transformation. While African urbanisation patterns are diverse, up to now few may be deemed economically sustainable (ibid.: 160). The concern, moving forward, is another period of urbanisation without the structural transformation believed necessary to meet development goals. Structural transformation is defined here as the process of moving economic resources from low to higher productivity activities (ibid.: 149). It involves a shift from low-productivity agriculture towards industrial manufacturing. Africa's urbanisation can engender structural transformation if accompanied by productive employment and sufficient public goods (ibid.: 147). In many African countries, a large portion of the urban labour force remains trapped in low-productivity informal services activities and access to public goods is limited and/or unequal. Specifically, infrastructure and investment must keep up with rapid urban growth, better connecting urban centres. Urban planning and local governance must be actively promoted (ibid.). Urbanisation is a necessary condition for structural transformation, but without appropriate governmental support and financial investment it cannot act as the sole agent of structural transformation (ibid.: 150).

Structural transformation involves agglomeration. Big and small cities can benefit from agglomeration economies by using fewer resources to support a larger population. Increasing returns from agglomeration makes cities more attractive. This attractiveness further draws talents and investments, creating a virtuous circle of urbanisation and development it is argued. These advantages allow cities to increase productivity and hence economic gains through three broad functions: matching, sharing, and learning (ibid.: 149). First, cities can help firms mix and match their unique requirements for labour, material inputs, and premises. Second, the larger scales of cities

facilitate access to a wider range of shared services and infrastructure. Third, cities enable knowledge sharing and the cross-fertilisation of ideas (ibid.: 198).

At present, informal settlements compromise moves towards structural transformation. The report states that informality is an outcome of accommodating rapid population and economic growth in cities (ibid.: 163). It is also due to a lack of institutional capacity to protect property rights, enforce regulations, and manage planned urban expansion. The report states that in many sub-Saharan African cities, new developments leapfrog from the central cores (ibid.: 170). African cities thus suffer from urban sprawl, which is argued to decrease the likelihood and benefits of connectivity within urban areas (ibid.). Echoing to some extent the conceptual ambiguity raised in *The State of African Cities*, the *African Economic Outlook* suggests that static categories of urban and rural no longer capture the hybrid nature of shifting relations between cities and countryside in Africa. Many villagers become urbanised, through commuting or via circular migration, while city dwellers continue with many of their previous 'rural' activities, notably urban farming (ibid.: 160).

Investment in urban infrastructure is critical to improve connectivity with rural areas; to match formal real estate markets better with the housing demand; manage urban land expansion; and develop public mass transport systems within and between cities. New policies must be adapted to the specificities of Africa's urban realities; they must tap 'innovative' ways of financing the development of sustainable cities and be implemented through effective multi-level governance systems. Infrastructure policies are essential to activating the comparative advantages of all cities. Firms need supportive infrastructure, especially transport and energy, to avoid being spatially trapped inside crowded city centres (ibid.: 201). The report does not consider how religion or faith could be understood as an innovative way of funding. Nor does it consider how innovative funding streams may compromise other policy objectives, especially around social development and providing equal access to infrastructure.

The report suggests that expanding social businesses can help tap the potential of the urban informal economy (ibid.: 215). Social businesses have long existed in Africa, extending back to traditional systems of mutual support. African urban dwellers adopt and create new forms of social businesses adapted to their urban realities. Unlike traditional businesses, social businesses are not driven by profits but by the mission to provide solutions to social challenges. Mutual assistance groups or community enterprises (mainly co-operatives) are widespread in urban areas. There is no reflection on the relationship between religion and faith and social businesses. This will be important to consider.

In agreement with other reports on development and urbanisation in Africa, there is faith that urbanisation can create a demand—among an emerging urban middle-class—for industrial products, thereby contributing towards structural transformation (ibid.: 198). Rising incomes shift the household demand towards industrial products, while the middle-class preference for diversity allows value-creation through differentiation. And yet, Africa has some of the world's most unequal cities (ibid.: 166). The social consequences of urban inequality affect human development outcomes, limit access to opportunities. Crime rates and insecurity are high and tend to grow with city size, such as in Johannesburg and Lagos. The spatial divide heightens social disparities across neighbouring urban areas. Large gated communities heighten spatial segregation and hamper social cohesion. One example is Eko Atlantic City on an artificial island five kilometres away from Lagos that offers

exclusive amenities for upper class and expatriate elites. The report does not consider how religio-urban development contributes to or ameliorate inequalities and/or spatial divisions within African cities.

The report advances a policy agenda for improving the contribution of sustainable cities to Africa's structural transformation (ibid.: 236). It explains how urbanisation may be harnessed through participative and multi-sectoral national urban strategies for citizen-led urban development that can, in turn, increase well-being in cities. While strategies should be context-specific, they will likely have three overarching priorities: (1) clarifying land rights; (2) accelerating and improving the provision of infrastructure and services; and (3) managing the growth of intermediary cities. The report suggests that urban priorities must be integrated into long-term, national development strategies (ibid.: 241). At the very heart of these national urban strategies should be urban land reform (ibid.: 242):

Urban land is the primary building block of cities, and land policy lies at the heart of Africa's sustainable urban transition and structural transformation. Who owns land and how it is managed will determine the density of a city, the street layout, the zoning scheme, building codes and tax regimes. Land-use management systems, formal and informal, shape the dynamics of economic agglomerations, natural resource use, social inclusion and political representation' (ibid.).

It is asserted that delivering better infrastructure and services is the primary catalyst for sustainable urban development (ibid.: 243). Investment in infrastructure shapes the nature of urbanisation and the location and productivity of households, informal business and established firms of all sizes. Where infrastructure is insufficient, expensive and poorly maintained, it underpins the high cost of urban services and reduces the benefits of urbanisation. Hard and 'soft' infrastructure need to be combined (ibid.: 244). The latter includes governance institutions, legislation, public engagement capacity and fiscal accounting mechanisms. These are necessary to improve the effectiveness of hard infrastructure. Urban infrastructure development also requires understanding how the urban poor already access services where the state does not cater for them. According to the report, these systems are not necessarily egalitarian or efficient and they do not necessarily optimise productivity. But, they should be recognised as critical to how many African cities are organised and run. At their best these organisations reflect an organic strength that could be harnessed (ibid.).

The African Economic Outlook stresses how planning the growth of intermediary cities also contributes to national development (ibid.: 246). Cities and towns of different sizes need to be better linked and be encouraged to develop different, evolving functions, a point that is made in other recent and relevant policy documents. In fact, the report is adamant that intermediary cities are essential to reaping the 'urbanisation dividend' (ibid.). Two-thirds of the growth in the urban population by 2030 is expected to take place in cities of less than 500 000 inhabitants. Intermediary cities and towns will thus play an increasing role in sustaining the benefits of urbanisation in terms of poverty alleviation and furthering structural transformation. Whether this emphasis on intermediate cities is the result of pragmatism or indicative of how the development field is losing faith with the prospects for transforming African megacities is interesting to consider.

In order to effectively implement national urban strategies, action is required in three areas of governance: i) empowering local levels of policy making; ii) attracting and growing the necessary capacity for local governments to function; and iii) enhancing transparency at all levels of government. The challenge to multi-level governance and service delivery then, is to stitch together the initiatives of local communities, often developed in the absence of formal state involvement, with the financing and roll-out of formal services (ibid: 249). The report discusses this in relation to Lagos, more specifically (ibid.: 250). Here, the government has three distinct administrative levels: national, state and local. In a megacity such as Lagos, the state government is the dominant actor, creating too large a democratic distance between local communities and institutions making decisions about regional infrastructure and service delivery.

An underlying dilemma across the continent is that many African countries with a weak national government capacity tend to have *even weaker* local government institutions (ibid.: 251). Three guiding principles are suggested to help define adequate multi-level governance systems in a pragmatic way. First, the basis for decentralisation is recognising that local actors are best placed to calibrate housing and public transport investment with land-use management regulations. Second, the efficiency of the territorial system is best co-ordinated and financed at national and regional scales. Third, any effective intergovernmental system must be designed to allow local empowerment of the majority of urban dwellers who are effectively building their own communities, towns and cities in the absence of effective state provision. Over time, urban management must effectively stitch together the ‘top-down’ policy agenda of the state and the ‘bottom-up’ efforts of the citizens.

Effective multi-level governance requires new skills, managerial approaches and institutional culture across all levels and dimensions of the public sector that implement or contribute to urban policies (ibid.: 254). Many governments lack building professionals such as engineers, planners, urban finance experts, project managers, local economic development practitioners, environmental and building regulation inspectors, transport planners, engineers, and land-use lawyers (ibid.).

The document contains economic reports on both DRC and Nigeria. In relation to the former it states (ibid.: 280) that the growth of the Congolese economy slowed in 2015, falling to 7.7% from 9.2% in 2014, a trend set to continue in 2016 (7%), with a recovery expected to start in 2017 (8%). Meanwhile, poverty remains widespread, although the country has made significant progress in implementing the Millennium Development Goals (established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000). The country faces significant challenges in the planning and financing of urban development in order to improve quality of life and to capitalise on the opportunities provided by urbanisation. Although urbanisation is viewed as an opportunity by the Congolese authorities, it faces a real challenge in terms of the planning and financing of urban development. Urban areas dominate the national economy and offer better living conditions than rural areas. However, there are risks associated with current urbanisation trends in the DRC: an increase in unplanned and informal neighbourhoods, the poor quality of urban transport and congestion in cities, and limited access to social infrastructure. The country does not currently have a national urbanisation strategy (ibid.).

In relation to Nigeria (ibid.: 308), the country is reported as experiencing sluggish economic growth since the end of 2015 with the growth rate dropping

to an estimated 3.0% in December 2015, leading the authorities to adopt an expansionary 2016 budget that aims to stimulate the economy. Nigeria has been rapidly urbanising and fast-growing cities such as Lagos and Kano face increasing unemployment and income inequality because of poor urban planning and weak links between structural transformation and urbanisation. Sustainable cities can only be driven by structural transformation if there is an integrated approach to urban planning. It is expected that the Federal Ministry of Power, Works and Housing will review the urban development policy and work with other ministries to improve service delivery and chart a way forward for tapping into the opportunities provided by the growth of cities in Nigeria. Lagos is one of the seven mega-cities in Africa.

Conclusion

While offering a range of different emphases, there is a common narrative among these policy documents. It should be noted at the outset that this narrative does not strongly feature religion and faith-based actors and it barely touches upon religious-led urbanisation. Urbanisation is viewed almost exclusively in secular terms. Rapid urbanisation in Africa is seen as an opportunity that can lead to—or may be harnessed to deliver—intensified industrialisation, a growing consumption-oriented urban middle class, development goals, poverty reduction, enhanced sustainability, a growth in agricultural productivity and even lower fertility rates. The obstacles to making a ‘success’ of Africa’s urbanisation, which are all widely acknowledged, include an infrastructure, finance, planning and governance deficit. Other obstacles include corruption and a lack of ingenuity in working with informalisation (in terms of both city dwellings and the economic activity). In relation to the latter, many reports warn against ‘replacing’ informalisation, stressing rather the need to work with local communities. Much hope in this collection of policy documents is placed in the ‘fresh start’ that Africa’s rapidly growing smaller and intermediate size cities represent. These are viewed as not yet tainted by sprawl and as crucial in potentially seizing the economic gains of agglomeration and differentiation. Religious urbanisation is not a prominent feature of this narrative but, were it inserted, it would appear as a disruptive or complexifying influence. Religious urbanisation lies awkwardly between an example of ‘legitimate’ infrastructural development, further informalisation, social business-led development, and innovative, community-based funding.

Moreover, while delivering much-needed infrastructure to cities, the ‘autonomy’ (real and/or perceived) of religious urbanisation presents a threat to security and the inequitable distribution of these benefits may threaten social cohesion. On the rare occasions when religion is mentioned in these reports, as in *The State of African Cities*, it may be linked with ‘extremes’ of radicalisation, social conflict, and spatial segregation. While not denying that such dimensions of religious activity exist, our project aims to challenge urban development discourse’s limited recognition of religion by highlighting a number of interrelated themes and areas to explore:

- The relatively ubiquitous character of religious discourse and assumptions in the urban contexts we investigate, so that it cannot easily be separated from (and thus regarded as irrelevant to) forms of economic, political, or social action in civil and even planning spheres. One example of such ubiquity is what Meyer (2004) has called the ‘Pentecostalist’ cultural style that has permeated

much of the public sphere in West Africa, allowing Pentecostal expressive forms and assumptions to permeate the public sphere beyond the scope of specific congregations or even followers of such churches. Referring specifically to Lagos, Osinulu refers to the ways in which every street corner seems to be ‘anchored’ by a Pentecostal venue (2014: 116).

- The potential role of religious groups in contexts where the state retreats from the public sphere, opening the possibility and/or necessity for new independent social forms of order and provision to emerge, including those organised on religious lines. Even though these provisions appear ‘informal’ from one perspective, they may actually represent the majority frameworks through which urban governance is socially administered. In this sense, informality can attain a greater claim to legitimacy than the state.
- The extent to which, by functioning in such informal yet highly public realms, religious organisations and FBOs operate not merely through ‘spectacular’ architectural spaces such as mega-churches and mosques but also through more apparently prosaic, infrastructural forms such as medical and educational services, water provision, and road maintenance.
- The complex relationship between such infrastructural action and the cultivation of legitimacy and trust in the provision of services. In this sense religious infrastructural provision, for instance in the offering of access to water bore holes in the urban context, may be relied upon to a greater degree than more exclusively private, commercial forms of provision.
- The ways in which infrastructural services offered by religious groups should not necessarily be seen as catering only to their own members: in other words, a medical facility run by a church is likely to be open to members of other faiths. Infrastructural provision thus has the capacity to create and draw upon networks of service use that cross-cut denominational or doctrinal divisions.
- At the broadest level, the affinities between religious, ethical and infrastructural action in the urban sphere as part of the public ‘resurgence’ of religion (cf. Warikobo, 2014). Complementing such urban competency, the economic, social, and cultural resources cultivated by religious organizations in managing mobility between urban centres at transnational levels, as economic and missionary motivations for migration coincide (e.g. Coleman and Maier, 2013).

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