

# TOWARDS AN AFRICA URBAN AGENDA



**UN HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

 United Nations  
Economic Commission for Africa



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HS/065/15E

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© 2015 United Nations  
First printing September 2015

Title: Towards an African Urban Agenda  
Language: English  
ISBN: 978-99944-61-72-7  
eISBN: 978-99944-62-72-8

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication was undertaken as a complement to the Africa Regional review report of the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development- Habitat III in support of the development of an inclusive and sustainable African Urban Agenda.

This publication was undertaken as part of the Africa Urban Agenda Programme, an initiative of UN-Habitat. The report was conceptualized by UN-Habitat and drafted by the African Center for Cities at the University of Cape Town and jointly published by United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN- Habitat) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

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### FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The Federal Government of Nigeria  
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)





*We aspire that, by 2063, Africa shall be a prosperous continent with the means and resources to drive its own development, and where African people have a high standard of living and quality of life, sound health and well-being; Well educated citizens and skills revolution underpinned by science, technology and innovation for a knowledge society; Cities and other settlements are hubs of cultural and economic activities, with modernized infrastructure, and people have access to all the basic necessities of life including shelter, water, sanitation, energy, public transport and ICT; Economies are structurally transformed to create shared growth, decent jobs and economic opportunities for all... (Agenda 2063 - The Africa We Want)*





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## UN-HABITAT FOREWORD



Africa is now at an impressive stage of transformation witnessing rapid wealth generation. This is manifested in the high growth of GDP in many countries and linked to the significant growth in urbanization that goes hand in hand. While Africa is still the

least urbanized continent, its urbanization rates are higher than anywhere else in the world. These parallel evolutions – the growth of GDP and growth of urbanization – present a unique opportunity to review the African urban growth pattern so that over the next three to five decades, urbanization can be properly guided as a driver of sustainable development. The alternative to planned urbanization is a chaotic evolution of towns and cities that will be a hindrance to prosperity and social integration. In the last two decades, there has been a growing professional consensus on the role of sustainable urbanization as a tool for development. Studies and findings from Economic Geography from the 1990s provide consistent scientific evidence of this correlation (World Bank, 2009).

The nature of Africa's economic growth till date has been mostly based on the primary sector of the economy (extractive industries and agriculture). The expected next step of substantive development will be a progressive shift towards more productive sectors of the economy, mainly industrial manufacturing (secondary sector) and services (tertiary sector). The main vehicle for this sectoral transition is urbanization which changes the structural compositions of all sizes of cities, from the large cities to the rural villages. When this transition is properly managed it tends to yield the expected development

outcomes such as productivity increases, rising employment and income resulting from skilled activities in industry and services, yielding increased prosperity and higher quality of life. The capacity of urbanization to generate wealth is greatly determined by the quality of its design, stemming from the fact that urbanization is a social and community endeavor.

Although Africa currently faces urban challenges, it has, more importantly, an immense opportunity of directing urbanization towards a model conducive to prosperity, employment and social well-being. There have been examples of huge urbanization processes, as illustrated with the case of China, where the role of urbanization in fostering development has been clearly demonstrated. However, the Chinese model has not been able to effectively address the environmental dimensions of urbanization. The objective of the United Nations, stated in the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 11 - to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable - advocates for a balance between the three pillars of sustainable development; economic, social and environmental, towards a prosperous society.

In today's African reality where there is still much development needed, the role of efficient urbanization as a tool for development holds unprecedented potential. In most of the analysis of African development there is a lack of in-depth attention to the role of urbanization as a tool for economic growth. Most of the analysis focus on the ailments of urbanization but not on transforming urbanization into a tool for a successful development strategy. This one-sided approach has promoted ad hoc and partial interventions in detriment of a strategic vision that will increase the advantages of urbanization.



To foster a more sustainable urbanization model in Africa, some changes of approach are required. At national government level, there is a need to clearly state the rules of the game country-wide in order to mobilize society, stakeholders, the private sector and foreign investment in the process. A National Urban Policy can be a good tool for framing the debate, and build consensus and strategies that can deliver a level playing field to unleash the opportunities presented by urbanization. At the local level, there is a need to focus the strategic interventions in a pragmatic manner in order to address the local specificities on rules and regulations, urban design and financial design conducive to planned city extensions and other tools that can yield the expected wealth derived from planned urbanization.

The urban transformation that UN-Habitat foresees for Africa demands in depth consideration of its legal framework, its urban design and its financial plan. In some countries, there may be no need for more legislation but for existing legislation to be consistently applied. Special attention is required in urban planning because the current analysis of urbanization shows an insufficient allocation of land for common spaces and services, severely undermining the economic value of buildable plots and contributing to the continent-wide issue of urban congestion. Equally important is the need to focus on the financial design as in general, the value that urbanization generates is not currently shared sufficiently to offset its cost.

These fundamental pillars of urbanization, known as the three-pronged approach, are usually determined at the national level. That is why a renewed role of central government in this process, together with the consistent empowerment of local authorities, is proposed. In this process, Africa owes debts of gratitude to the excellent

efforts of African Ministers in charge of Housing and Urban Development over the past decades. They have articulated a shared view towards Habitat III, through the sessions of the African Ministerial Conference of Housing and Urban Development and in other fora, integrating productive urbanization within the core pillars of Agenda 2063, for Africa's structural transformation.

In this context, UN-Habitat is actively supporting the Africa Urban Agenda Programme in close cooperation with Member States. This cooperation has sought to coordinate urban actors in Africa and support systematic urban policy formulation, advocacy, and implementation and monitoring leading up to Habitat III in 2016. I commend the process of citizens' participation that many African countries are engaging in, through National Urban Forums, National Habitat Committees and preparation of National Habitat III Reports, which, in both bottom-up and top-down processes, seeks to deepen the ownership of the transformative and people-centered Africa Urban Agenda.

UN-Habitat's partnership with UNECA to link these processes with the macro-economic planning and feed them into regional integration is much commended and give all of us much hope and energy for Africa's urban transformation.



**Joan Clos**

Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director  
United Nations Human Settlements Programme  
(UN-Habitat)



## UNECA FOREWORD



As Africa's urban population almost doubles in the next two decades, the imperative of steering and guiding the growth process – through national planning – becomes a priority. Africa's rapid urbanization presents an unprecedented opportunity to accelerate

the region's transformation to respond to development challenges. Africa needs a transformative agenda that entails substantial changes in the sectoral composition of its GDP including a shift of productive activities from primary to secondary sectors, particularly industry and manufacturing, as well as a change in the spatial distribution of economic activities from rural to urban areas. This is essential given concerns about the quality and sustainability of the region's impressive economic growth rate in recent years despite the optimism about future prospects.

Urbanization is a decisive determinant of Africa's ability to realize its vision of transformation. The dynamism which African cities are exhibiting today with respect to higher value creation, increasing productivity, fostering

innovation, and optimizing infrastructure investment, provides an important lever for change. ECA has thus reinvigorated its work on urbanization to help seize this unique combination of opportunities.

As decision-makers recognize urbanization as inevitable and appreciate its implications, they will cushion its impact and harness its benefits. The narrative on urbanization in Africa must move away from a negative to a more positive tone. It is urgent to improve the livability and increase productivity of cities. While Africa's urban population growth is a powerful asset for development, this can only be realized when cities are properly planned and adequately serviced.

Unfortunately, few African countries have adequately factored the challenges and opportunities of sustainable urbanization in their national development planning. Although urbanization has the potential to make economies and people more prosperous, most African countries have found themselves grossly unprepared in the face of the spatial, demographic, social, cultural, economic and environmental challenges associated with urbanization. If the potential to harness urbanization is not "captured" by forward-looking policymakers within the next several years, the continent may witness intractable obstacles to its vision.





Setting the agenda right is just the obvious first step. Much more is needed if implementation of good ideas are to take center stage. I am convinced the youthfulness, creativity and innovation associated with cities are essential assets for the industrialization drive most African countries envision. As latecomers, African countries have one unique factor over others: they can learn from previous mistakes. And, in so doing, lead the way for the urban landscape.

**Carlos Lopes**

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# 01

## INTRODUCTION

The next two years provide an unprecedented opportunity for member states of the United Nations and their populations to shape the urban future of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Every country, every member of civil society and the private sector, along with their governments, is expected to engage vigorously on the state of urbanisation in their country, determining what needs to be done to achieve transformative outcomes over the next 20 years.

This report is a resource for African citizens and governments as they utilise the opportunity that the Habitat III process opens up. More specifically, the report aims to strengthen Habitat Agenda Partners and other non-state actors in Sub-Saharan Africa in their policy dialogues and capacity-building processes. The report is designed to inform and enrich national level engagements across sub-Saharan Africa on advancing the urban agenda.

The report puts the agenda of Habitat III in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) due to be finalised in September 2015; the Conference of the Parties, signatory to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP)<sup>1</sup> scheduled for Paris in December 2015 and the AfriCities Summit 7, planned for 29 November- 3 December 2015. The contemporary political moment is further contextualised in terms of the lineage of ideas and policies that stem from Habitat I in 1976 and Habitat II in 1996.

Shaping all of these debates is the broader African-driven process of the African Union to formulate an endogenous growth trajectory towards 2063. The spirit of pan-Africanism, cultural pride and political determination called upon by the African Union serves as a touchstone for this report.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework is striving to extend the work of the Millennium Development Goals to eliminate extreme poverty and create a development framework that can see more inclusive and sustainable patterns of growth.<sup>2</sup>

The SDG discussion is novel in that it explicitly confronts the fact that the current model of extractive growth violates the limits of the natural resource base of the Earth and therefore requires ‘a radical shift towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production and resource use.’<sup>3</sup> It also recognises that poverty cannot be disconnected from inequality, which speaks to inequitable access to power and resources globally, regionally, within countries, within settlements and within households if we consider patriarchal gender relations.

The post-2015 focus on natural resource limits is also confronted through the debate on climate change, which reaches an important milestone at the Paris COP (21). Since the Kyoto Protocol has expired, a binding deal on carbon emission cuts to stay within a range of 2 degrees



warming has yet to be completed. Optimists are looking to the dissuasions in Paris to deliver a universally-applicable agreement that will be legally binding. With the growing awareness that cities are central to the overall global effort to address climate variability through the work of the C40 and ICLEI, among many others, the Paris conference is expected to reaffirm the importance of urban management in this agenda.<sup>4</sup>

The implications of these multilateral processes are profound, especially for Africans. For the first time since the heyday of industrial modernisation after the Second World War, there is near-universal acknowledgement that the current model of economic growth is untenable. A new pathway has to be found that is more environmentally sustainable, socially just and economically inclusive.

Since Africa has undoubtedly been the worst victim of unjust global economic rules and dynamics, rooted in the colonial project of exploitation and political subjugation with profound cumulative effects of maldevelopment, it is impossible to overstate just how significant the current moment of development rethinking is. We are on the edge of a paradigm change in mainstream development thinking and practice, which is potentially good news for Africa in general and its cities in particular.<sup>5</sup> The movement towards a shared African perspective on these global debates is vital and this was reflected in the elaboration of the Common African Position (CAP) on the post-2015 Development Agenda in January 2014.<sup>6</sup>



 Nairobi, Kenya. © UN-Habitat

To illustrate the potential for paradigm change, *The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda* frames the current conjuncture boldly:



A new development agenda should carry forward the spirit of the Millennium Declaration and the best of the MDGs, with a practical focus on things like poverty, hunger, water, sanitation, education and healthcare. But to fulfil our vision of promoting sustainable development, we must go beyond the MDGs. They did not focus enough on reaching the very poorest and most excluded people. They were silent on the devastating effects of conflict and violence on development. The importance to development of good governance and institutions that guarantee the rule of law, free speech and open and accountable government was not included, nor the need for inclusive growth to provide jobs.<sup>7</sup>

Most seriously, the MDGs fell short by not integrating the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainable development as envisaged in the Millennium Declaration, and by not addressing the need to promote sustainable patterns of consumption and production. The result was that environment and development were never properly brought together.<sup>8</sup>

It is anticipated that this will be addressed through the Sustainable Development Goals. It is also for this reason that there has been a massive global campaign<sup>9</sup> for an urban Goal over the past two years because effective urban management is seen as the linchpin for an agenda that brings the environment and development together.<sup>10</sup>

Equally significant is that the philosophical basis of development advocated by the Goals is socially, economically and environmentally integrated – a

perspective that is imperative to action at the city scale where the complex challenges of development meet and are concentrated. There is thus in the Goals and post-2015 processes not only a commitment to addressing the sub-national scale, but to doing so holistically.

It is with this global opportunity in mind that the African Union's Africa 2063 vision and campaign is gaining traction. The 2063 vision is focussed on:

- A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development
- An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance
- An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law
- A peaceful and secure Africa
- An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics
- An Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of its women Youth Africa as a strong, united and influential global player and partner<sup>11</sup>

The task now is to position this African thinking in global debates and forums, such as Habitat III, where binding commitments will be made by all nations. In this regard, African countries must prioritise the importance



of creating the enabling conditions for a structural economic shift from an agricultural or resource-based economy towards significant improvement in manufacturing and processing of agricultural products, and gradual movement to a more knowledge-intensive, services and manufacturing structure.<sup>12</sup>

Africa's preparations for Habitat III, the first of the new cycle of UN post-2015 agreements, provides an excellent opportunity to project ideas on how vibrant, inclusive and sustainable cities and towns can unlock the continent's potential. First, it is important to consider what the Habitat Agenda involves and what the specificities of the African urban condition are. By considering material conditions on the ground, future trends and normative imperatives for sustainable urban development, the specific priorities of an African Urban Agenda will be clarified for analysis, debate and common action.



 Praia City, Cabo Verde. © UN-Habitat



# 02

## HABITAT AGENDA: TAKING STOCK AND CONSIDERING POTENTIAL



 Lagos, Nigeria. © UN-Habitat

The September 2014 General Assembly of the United Nations in New York affirmed that cities should be profiled more explicitly in global development priorities, endorsing a dedicated urban Sustainable Development Goal that commits the world to *'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'* for ratification in September 2015.<sup>13</sup>

For the organisers of Habitat III, the likelihood of a stand alone urban Goal (henceforth Goal 11) creates both opportunities and constraints as there is an obvious

imperative to align the emphasis of the high-level agreements not only in a single urban goal, but also in common targets and indicators.

Some hope that Habitat III, being billed as a 'New Urban Agenda', will build on Goal 11 and provide the first truly global urban paradigm and not just define the means of implementation of a few specified targets and indicators.<sup>14</sup>





If we are to achieve the African Union's 2063 vision, it would be a mistake to think that securing the stand alone urban Goal is enough and that Habitat III will have done its job if it simply affirms a general commitment to cities as sites of sustainable development. Rather, the challenge for 2016 is to set out an appropriate response to the African urban vortex, acknowledging the centrality of cities as urban pathways of national and global development. There is ample opportunity in the framing of the Habitat III agenda for African delegates to play a leading role in doing that.

UN-Habitat has laid out the following objectives for Habitat III:

- Undertake a critical review of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda
- Identify constraints to the implementation of the goals and objectives
- Develop a shared perspective on human settlements and sustainable urban development
- Tackle new challenges and opportunities that have emerged since Habitat II
- Outline a new development agenda to achieve inclusive, people-centred and sustainable urban development
- Engender a collective agreement on the role that sustainable urbanization can play to support sustainable development<sup>15</sup>

Habitat III's core task then is to deal with the issue of global leadership on cities, setting out a normative base, highlighting priority interventions that will shift the urban trajectory, provide a reporting structure that incentivizes good collective urban practices for current and future generations and addresses the imperative of securing adequate financing and support for poor countries who face the biggest urban challenges. It is up to individual stakeholder organizations, nation states and regional deliberations to provide the detailed evidence and experience on which the New Urban Agenda will rest.<sup>16</sup>

For African members, Habitat III offers the scope to refine further the commitments to participation that was agreed at Habitat I, and to slum eradication that was the consensus emerging from Habitat II. Habitat III has three new areas of focus for debate: substantive political and fiscal decentralization; holistic land-use policies (both inter-urban and intra-urban) linked to effective planning systems and integrated human settlements strategies that involve working with the poor to achieve the realization of housing and service rights. African imperatives on these issues to be taken up in the New Urban Agenda have a particular history and profile. Positioning the continent in the global deliberations effectively rests on deep knowledge about urban change and wisdom that bring to the foreground the political importance of urban-rural linkages, the deep poverty of many in African cities and the aspirations of the youth on the continent.



# 03

## AFRICAN URBANISATION: TRENDS AND PROSPECTS

No development policy cycle will impact Africa more directly than this one. The clock is ticking and the next two to three decades will define the urban transition on the continent, not least because of the massive expansion in the number of people living in these cities. Africa and Asia are the two most populous world regions and the least urbanised. The latest World Urbanization Prospects reports that: 'the most urbanized regions include Northern America (82 per cent living in urban areas in 2014), Latin America and the Caribbean (80 per cent), and Europe (73 per cent). In contrast, Africa and Asia remain mostly rural, with 40 and 48 per cent of their respective populations living in urban areas. All regions are expected to urbanize further over the coming decades but Africa and Asia are urbanizing faster than the other regions and are projected to become 56 and 64 per cent urban, respectively, by 2050.<sup>17</sup> Asia is expected to be predominantly urban by the mid-2020s and Africa by circa 2035.

### Differential Urbanisation Trends in Africa

While it is important for Africa to speak coherently to position its view in the global debate on the new urban agenda, we should be wary of overgeneralisation. The number of Africa's urban dwellers is projected to increase from 471 million (40 per cent) in 2015 to

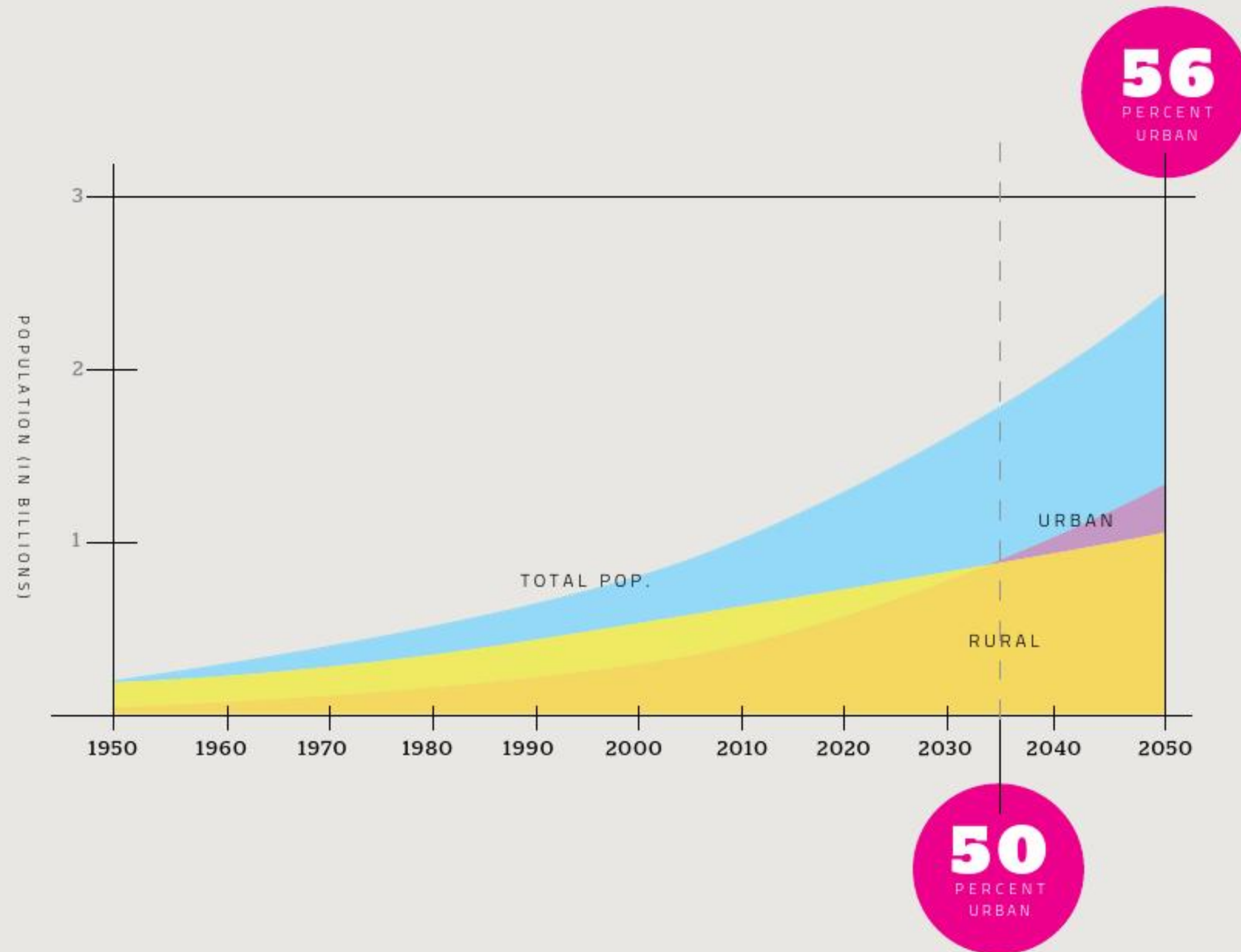


Accra, Ghana. © Shutterstock

1.33 billion in 2050 and Africa is projected to pass the 50 per cent urban tipping point around 2035.<sup>18</sup>

There is of course tremendous variation across Africa. Figure 2 segments Africa by region and depicts the level of urbanisation by country. Northern and Southern Africa are both relatively urbanised, with West and East Africa on the other end of the spectrum. This is important because the bulk of population growth in Africa will be concentrated in these two regions, which are also the poorest in terms of GDP/capita.<sup>19</sup>



**FIGURE 1: ACTUAL AND PROJECTED DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN AFRICA, 1950-2050<sup>20</sup>**

<sup>20</sup> United Nations (2014) *World Urbanization Prospects. The 2014 Revision*. New York: The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

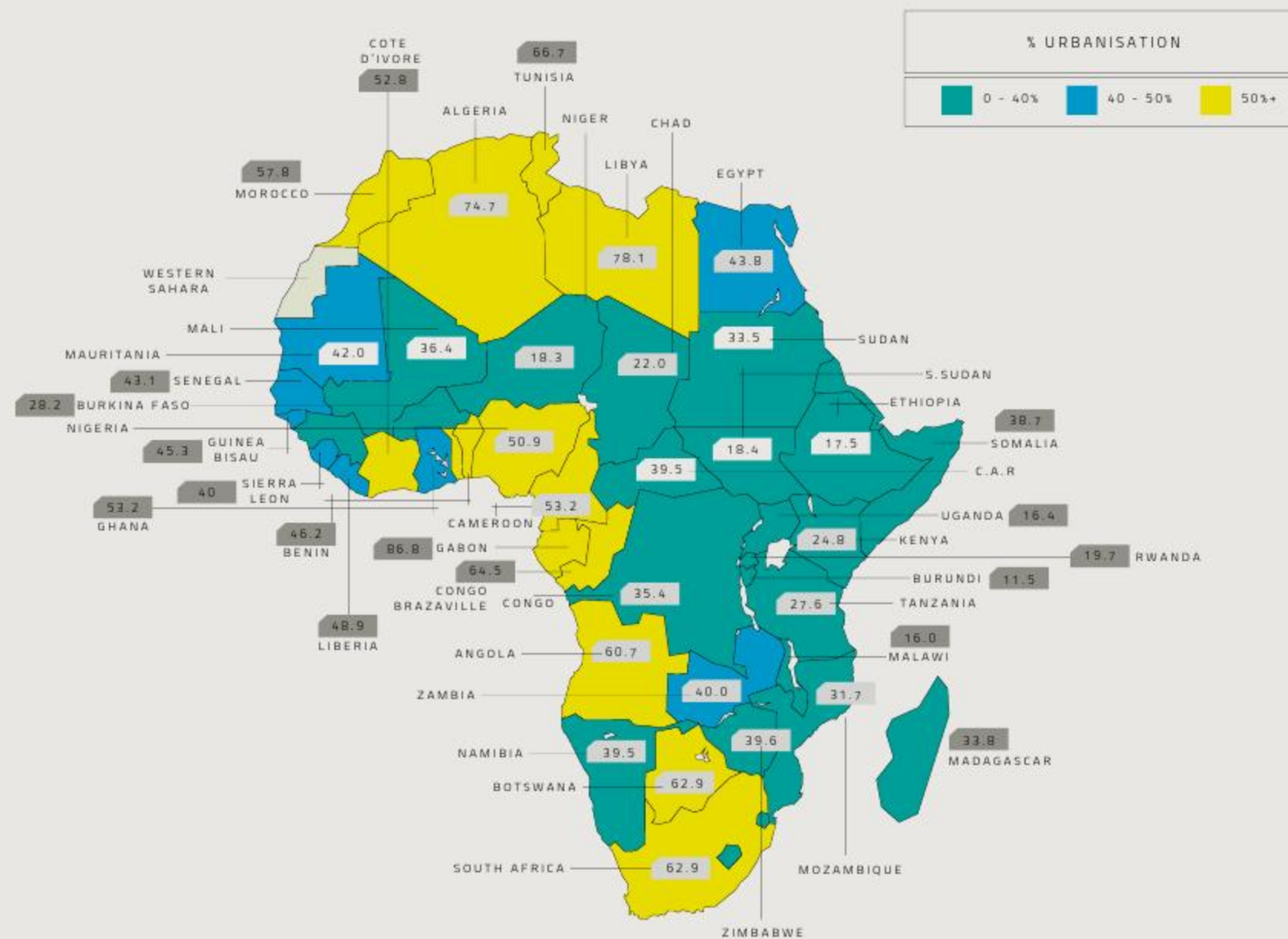
**Source:** United Nations, 2014

Figure 1 puts the current level of urbanisation in a hundred year context, ranging from 1950 and projected to 2050. These trend lines obscure the importance of regional and country variance and should therefore be considered in relation to the disaggregated data in Figure 2 below.

In addition to appreciating the enormous variety in levels and rates of urbanisation across the continent, it is also important to appreciate the phenomenon of urban

primacy coupled with small-scale urbanisation. Most sub-Saharan African countries are characterised by a lop-sided urban system. The traditional colonial capital city tends to be large and dominant in the national political economy, followed by much smaller cities and a large array of town-like urban areas (sometimes called peri-urban settlements). For example, the United Nations data suggest that in 2015, 9.2 per cent of the urban population reside in mega cities with populations exceeding 10 million, compared to 5.3 per cent in cities



**FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE URBAN POPULATION PER COUNTRY ACROSS AFRICAN REGIONS<sup>21</sup>**

<sup>21</sup> This figure is primarily based on: *African Economic Outlook, Demographic Statistics, 2014* - <http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/statistics/>; and *UN-Habitat (2014). State of African Cities Report. Nairobi: UN-Habitat, p. 266.*

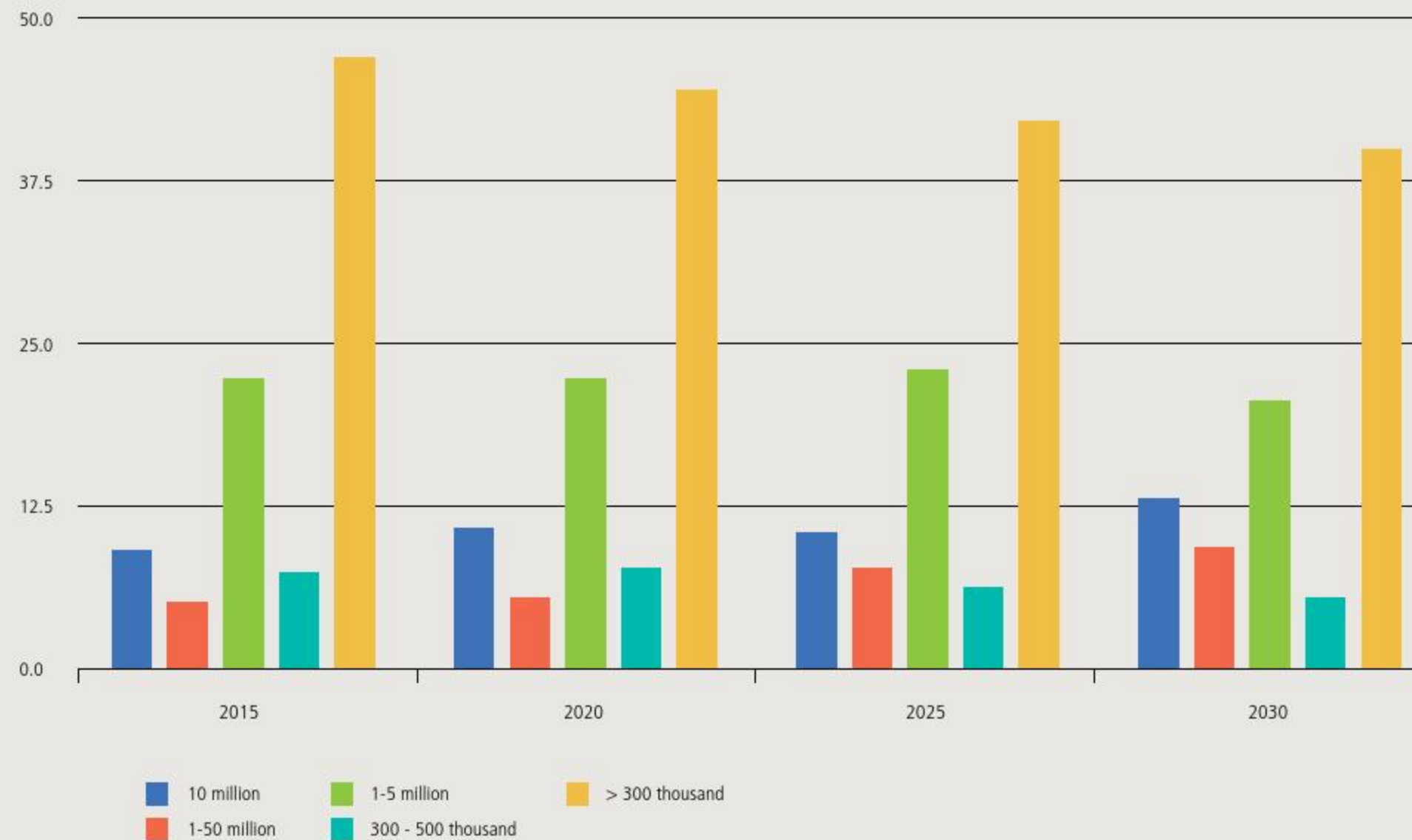
**Source:** *African Economic Outlook, Demographic Statistics, 2014* and *UN-Habitat, 2014*

between 5-10 million; 22.5 per cent in 1-5 million cities; 8.4 per cent in 0.5-1 million; 7.3 per cent in 300 000 – 500 000 cities and, most significantly, 47.3 per cent in cities smaller than 300 000 inhabitants.

In light of this, it may be prudent to prioritise research and policy that gives a better handle on how best to understand the overall urban system, namely the links between town and country, between small and large

cities and the insertion of African cities into global economic and resource networks. There is also a need for much greater clarity on how to manage cities with 1-5 million people and, even more crucially, how to address the majority urban condition of Africa, which is towns with fewer than 300,000 inhabitants. Figure 3 provides a graphic illustration of the distribution of settlements by size.



**FIGURE 3: AFRICAN URBAN DISTRIBUTION IN PERCENTAGE BY SETTLEMENT SIZE** <sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> United Nations (2014) *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*. New York: The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

**Source:** United Nations, 2014

## Youthful Labour Force intersects with Urbanisation

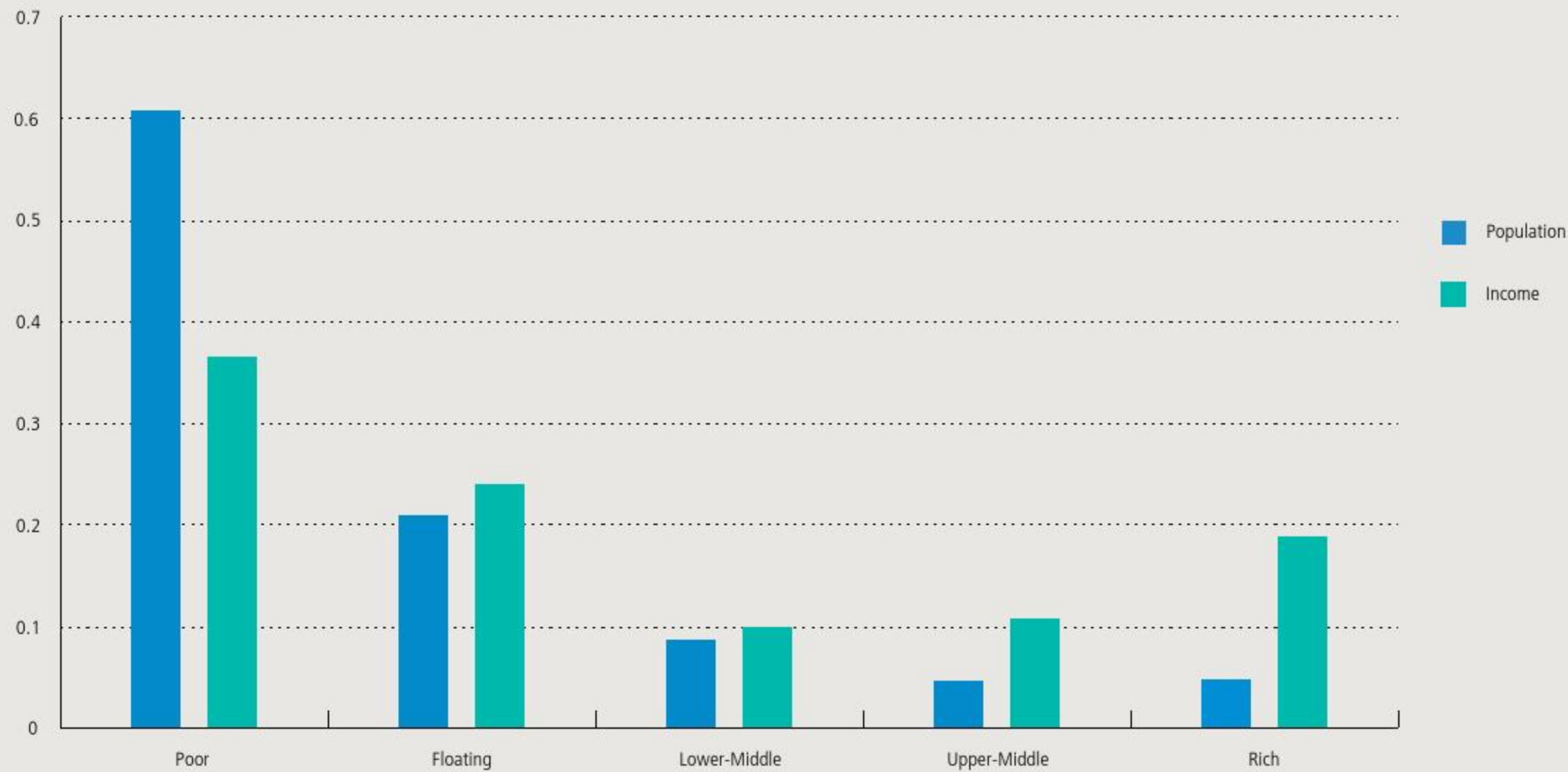
Africa's population will continue to grow until the end of this century whereas Asia will peak in about 50 years and most other continents have already plateaued. This demographic picture points to the fact that Africa, even now, has a youthful population and it is forecast that the continent will experience a demographic dividend over the next 40 years.<sup>23</sup>

According to the African Development Bank, 50 per cent of Africa's population are presently younger than 19 years of age.<sup>24</sup>

One of the distinctive features of Africa is that the vast majority of the labour force (population between 15-64) is trapped in vulnerable employment.<sup>25</sup>

Only 28 per cent of the labour force is in stable wage earning jobs contrasted with 63 per cent in vulnerable occupation. Furthermore, McKinsey Global Institute



**FIGURE 4: INCOME DISTRIBUTION ACROSS CLASS LINES IN AFRICA<sup>27</sup>**

<sup>27</sup> *The middle of the pyramid: Dynamics of the middle class in Africa. Market Brief, April 2011. Chief Economic Complex, African Development Bank*

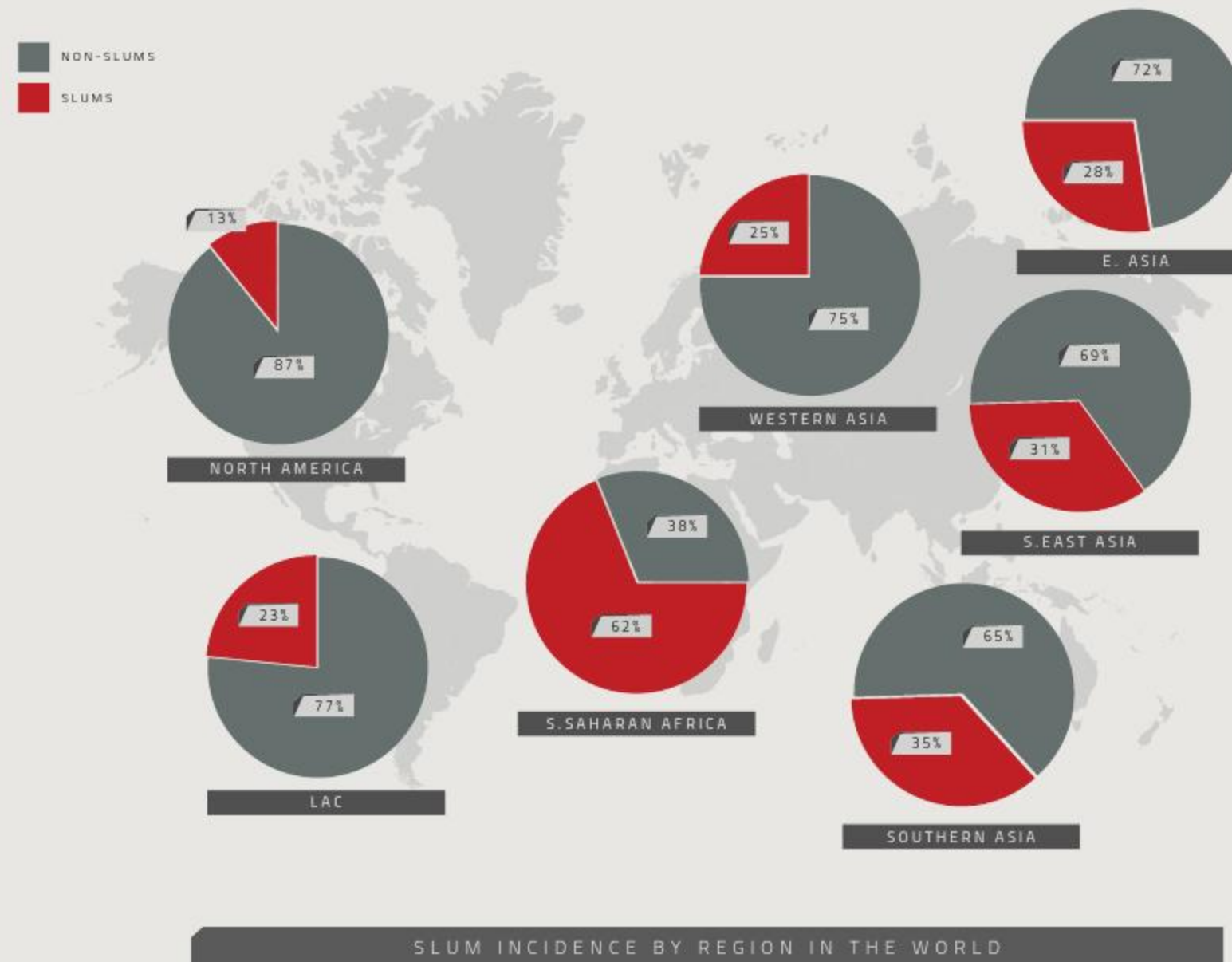
**Source:** African Development Bank (AfDB), 2011.

points out that between 2000-2010, when Africa experienced exceptionally robust GDP growth rates, the proportion of the labour force in vulnerable employment dropped by only 2 per cent, suggesting a worrying disconnect between economic growth and formal employment creation.<sup>26</sup>

This is a profound problem in light of the fact that Africa's labour force will treble between 2000-2050: rising from 400m to 1.2bn, according to the African

Development Bank (2011). Put directly, how will all of the new entrants into the labour market be absorbed into stable jobs if the current economic growth path is not radically altered? Put differently, how can the Agenda 2063 goal of inclusive growth, where the potential of young people are unleashed, be realized if vulnerable employment continues to be the norm in the African city?



**FIGURE 5: SLUM INCIDENCE BY REGION IN DEVELOPING WORLD** <sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Data is derived from a 2012 UN-Habitat Powerpoint presentation in possession of the authors.

**Source:** UN-Habitat, 2012

## Income Poverty and Inequality

A closely-related trend to large-scale vulnerable employment is the scale of income poverty in Africa. Figure 4 reflects that 81.7 per cent of Africans live on less than USD4 per day, with 60.8 per cent falling below the USD2 per day mark. For residents of cities, where even the most basic needs like water and shelter must be paid for in cash, income poverty is a major concern.

High costs of informal service provision and the absence of social safety nets expose low income urban households to particular risk.

If one does not have a stable or decent income, it is near impossible to have a decent quality of life and enjoy formal housing because the routine reproductive costs associated with (sub)urban living and consumer



good markets are unaffordable. In light of the scale of vulnerable employment and income poverty, it is not that surprising that, according to UN-Habitat, 61.7 per cent of urban Africans live in slums. This is much higher than the second-highest incidence of slum prevalence, which is South Asia at 45 per cent. Figure 5 puts the sub-Saharan Africa slum prevalence in global context.

There is a vicious cycle between poor living conditions, limited access to education and lack of decent health, obtaining decent work and surviving in the margins of society. This seems to be the dominant prospect for the hundreds of millions of young people who will enter the labour force over the next few decades, apart from the 61 per cent (273 million) already trapped in slum living. Unless the proposed paradigm shift argued for in the African Union's *Common African Position on the post-2015 Development Agenda* is substantially advanced, it is likely that the visionary goals Agenda 2063 will not be achieved.

## Infrastructural Deficits and Demands

Economic growth in Africa has been showing promising signs over the past decade even when the global economy went into recession after the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>29</sup> However, most economists point out that the extremely limited infrastructural footprint presents a binding constraint to continued and high growth. Most acute is the energy deficit, but this is reinforced by shortfalls in mobility infrastructures, water systems, ICT cabling and so on. Again, comparative data demonstrates that the

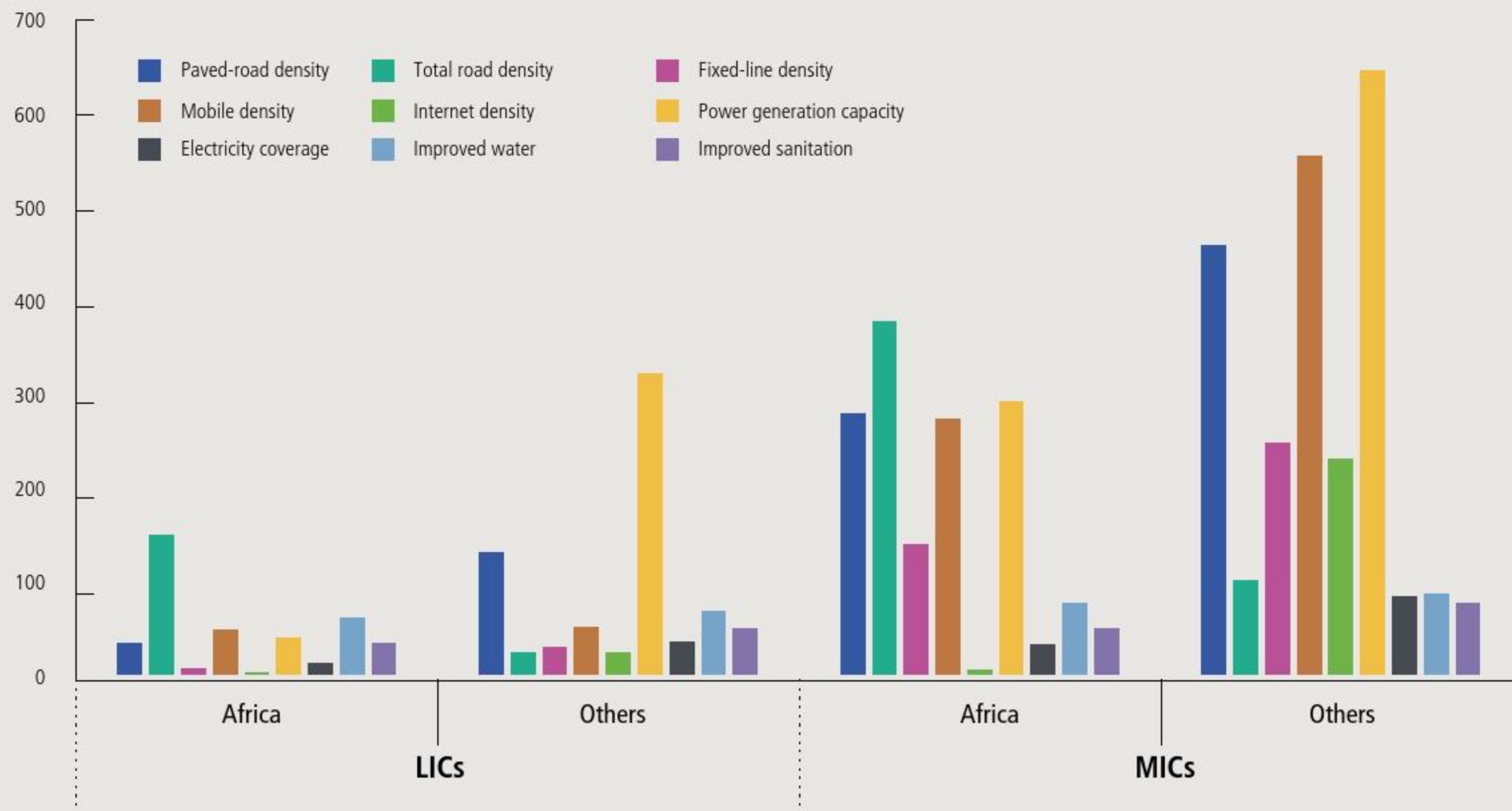
degree of infrastructure deficits is exceptional in Africa. In the Figure 6 there is a useful distinction between less industrial versus middle-income countries, which allows one to account for countries like Zambia and South Africa and compare like with like.



Abidjan, Ivory Coast. © Shutterstock



**FIGURE 6: INFRASTRUCTURE ENDOWMENTS FOR AFRICAN LICs/MICs<sup>30</sup> COMPARED TO OTHER GLOBAL REGIONS<sup>31</sup>**



<sup>30</sup> In 2011, the World Bank classified countries by income groups as follows: low income, USD1,025 or less; lower middle income, USD1,026 - USD4,035; upper middle income, USD4,036 - USD12,475; and high income, USD12,476 or more.

<sup>31</sup> AfDB [African Development Bank] (2013) *An Integrated Approach to Infrastructure Provision in Africa*. Tunis: AfDB.

**Source:** AfDB, 2013

**Note:** Road density is measured in kilometres per 100 square kilometres of arable land; telephone density in lines per thousand population; generation capacity in megawatts per million population and electricity, water, and sanitation coverage in percentage of population.



What sets Africa apart is that the relatively small size of national economies, restricted middle class and limited tax base - this thin economic base and weak associated fiscal and land regulatory regimes make its cities a generally less attractive proposition for international infrastructure investors. This is compounded by the fact that the infrastructure financing opportunities in other world regions are much larger than Africa's needs.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, infrastructure capital has options for where to invest, especially since mature OECD markets are now in need of massive infrastructure replacements and retrofits to meet more stringent environmental standards.

The general deficit in infrastructure capacity, combined with acute financing challenges create a situation in which there is tremendous pressure on the existing infrastructure investment budgets in terms of who and what it will prioritise and service. Private sector players are increasingly international actors who can promise major economic investments such as ports, airports, trunk roads and office blocks and they gain access to political decision makers and tend to get to the front of the development approval queue. These ad hoc, often physically and institutionally ringfenced forms of development, impact negatively on resources to address large-scale slum living conditions and as the urban population grows, the needs and financing gaps get ever larger. It is against these trends that the sobering conclusion of the World Bank research should be considered: '...affordability may be a barrier to further expansion of access. Most African households live on very modest budgets and spend more than half of their resources on food. The average African household has

a budget of no more than USD180 per month; urban households are only about USD100 per month better off than rural households,<sup>33</sup> but urbanites typically have to pay cash for all their basic needs, including food.

This finding reminds us that, not only is there insufficient investment in infrastructure to sustain economic productive capacity and growth, but even if the available pot was equitably shared between middle-class imperatives and ensuring access to basic services for the poor, there is little prospect of the latter happening due to such low rates of return on investment in narrow economic terms. As long as we will see GDP/capita levels below the USD2000 mark, coupled with high income inequality, we can be sure that the vast majority of urban African people cannot be serviced through conventional infrastructure investment approaches. Most African countries will have to figure out a different approach to ensure that the basic needs of their citizens are met whilst creating the infrastructural platforms for growth. An important part of this equation is the unforeseeable impacts of climate variability and numerous other environmental threats.

## Urban Ecosystems and Climate Change

In many African cities, inequality is not simply driven by income or employment. Inequality is exacerbated by factors such as unequal access to robust or safe infrastructure and natural resources. For many residents of small towns who depend on the integrity of untreated water, urban expansion without significant improvement in ecosystem management poses a threat to life and





well-being. Across Africa, cities with weak land use and traffic regulation and under-capacitated natural resource management put poor urban populations at risk, not just to major events associated with climate change but also everyday exposures to air, water and soil pollutants.<sup>34</sup>

Due in part to Africa's resource curse<sup>35</sup> access to, and the benefits derived from, its resources often perpetuate inequality. For Africa, the nexus between the environmental crisis, the global economy and the second urbanisation wave<sup>36</sup> exacerbate the exposure of all Africans to environmental risks associated with resource extraction and depletion as raw materials are exported for urban consumption elsewhere. African cities are not simply the recipients of global environmental change and risk but depending on how they are mismanaged they can also generate ecosystem instability and degradation. A key threat to urban resilience is sprawl and unchecked land use cover change that ignores known and predicted hazards and/or encroaches on sensitive areas. Figure 7 shows that, although there are significant protected areas, there are urban hot spots especially in sensitive lakeside, riverine and coastal areas that will have their ecological integrity decimated by the growth of large cities over the next two decades.

## Social Dynamics of Urbanisation

Intensifying informalisation, slum living and divided cities constitute a recipe for social conflict, especially as the increasingly youthful population increase their expectations through globalised consumer cultures and social media.<sup>38</sup> Most African urban areas are lacking

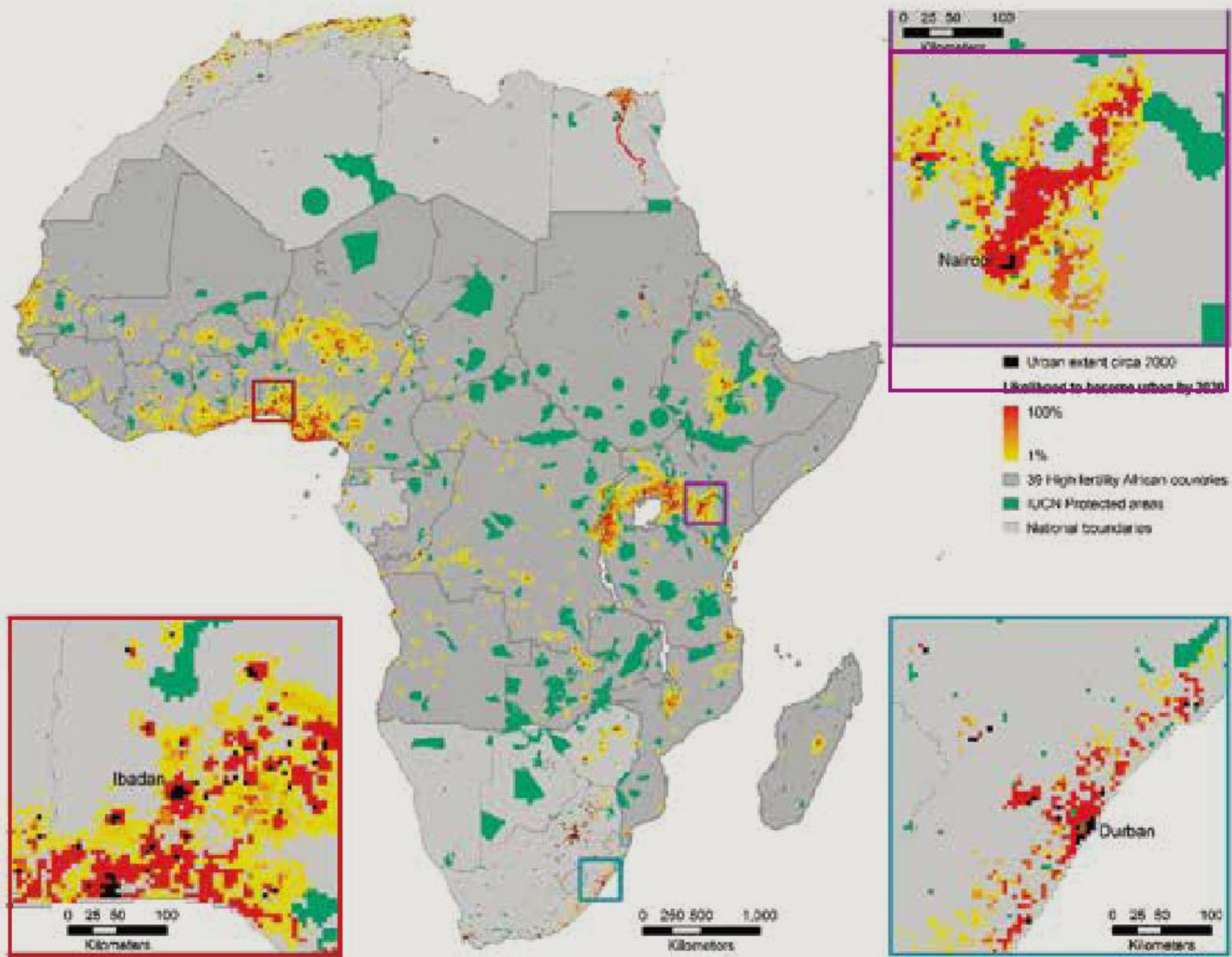
in effective and democratic urban governance and management. One of the drivers of this is the limited implementation of national decentralisation programmes and ambiguity over the urban responsibilities of central and local governments. The gap in accountability in settlement management is further complicated by hybrid and overlapping governance systems, reflected most acutely in land-use and tenure arrangements.<sup>39</sup>

Put differently, in the absence of cadastres that can render land-use transparent and predictable, a plurality of informal power dynamics have emerged in African cities that determine how land is used, serviced (or not), rented out, profited from and made available for coherent and systematic planning and regulation. Informal land and service-based power dynamics knit together elected politicians in loose coalitions with local strong men who rely on force, traditional authority status or dominance of political parties to exert control. In the absence of strong local democratic associations it is almost impossible to break the power of these de facto property and commodity mafias.

It is difficult to unravel and reform these practices since land use in particular has been subjected to such dynamics of elite control over decades. There are often vested interests that operate beyond democratic requirements for accountability and transparency. Governance reform is lagging far behind the ideals of democratic decentralisation as codified in the Habitat Agenda of 1996, the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development, or the aspirations of Agenda



**FIGURE 7: PROJECTED LAND USE COVER CHANGE RELATIVE TO PROTECTED AREAS** <sup>37</sup>



<sup>37</sup> Derived from: Pieterse, E. (2011) *Recasting urban sustainability in the South*, *Development*, 54(3): 309-316.

**Source:** Seto, Gunerap, Parnell and Luasa, in press



2063 as noted above. Linkages between corrupted and unregulated land regulation and formal tax collection capacity also erode opportunities for public interest value capture and can preclude the generation of local capital to address the urban problems already identified. A number of recent studies underscore that there is tremendous potential to use well-crafted regulations to connect land value appreciation and infrastructure investment to generate new revenue sources to finance urban investments.<sup>40</sup>

The flipside of weak governance is often disempowered civil society interests. Most African cities are endowed with dense social systems, especially since most households need to insert themselves into multiple networks and social settings to gain strategic information to stay in the 'game' of survival and expansion of livelihood options.<sup>41</sup> However, these institutions tend to stand apart from formal political institutions or overt political mobilisation because of the potential costs involved. Practically, this means that the incredibly rich seam of social capital does not get mobilised for effective democratic urban governance and management.

In summary, extraordinarily high levels of poverty and systemic neglect mark African urban areas. Into this breach, urban households invest an inordinate amount of time, energy and resources to activate informal systems of service provision to meet their daily needs.<sup>42</sup> Due to the predominance of informal economic life, combined with thin local institutional systems, the tax base for urban investment is wholly inadequate to meet the vast

needs of these territories. National governments perceive these conditions as justification for continued national control and management of urban areas, especially strategic nodes such as capital cities or strategically-located secondary cities. The net effect is that there is no coherent strategy or investment programme to address urban management imperatives across the diverse needs of the national settlement/urban system.



 Rabat, Morocco. © Philip Lange/Shutterstock



## WHAT DOES SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT MEAN FOR AFRICA?

This governance failure, is not as yet, seen as a major political concern or risk. To date, little has happened to political elites if urban areas continue to underperform or fail their citizens. Disease outbreaks such as Ebola, social unrest, and or rising terror threats may shift the current middle-class disregard for the public good in African cities.

The menu of urban policy reforms adopted by all governments present in Istanbul at Habitat II in 1996 to achieve sustainable urban development was summarised in the Habitat Agenda Declaration:

We, the Heads of State or Government [...] take this opportunity to endorse the universal goals of ensuring adequate shelter for all and making human settlements safer, healthier and more liveable, equitable, sustainable and productive. [...] We shall intensify our efforts to eradicate poverty and discrimination, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, and to provide for basic needs, such as education, nutrition and life-span health care services, and, especially, adequate shelter for all. To this end, we commit ourselves to improving the living conditions in human settlements in ways that are consonant with local needs and realities, and we acknowledge the need to address the global, economic, social and environmental trends to ensure the creation of better living environments for all people.

In this carefully-worded formulation, attention is being paid to the importance of local solutions for local problems but the reality is that many of the drivers that shape unsustainable patterns of urbanisation go well beyond the local and national content and into the international systems of governance, trade and regulation. This agenda, organised around the meta themes of shelter for all and sustainable human settlements, become codified in the reporting which all governments are expected to do in the preparations for Habitat III. The country reports that were submitted in 2014 had to cover seven themes (listed below) and provide evidence that was retrospective and, ideally, this analysis can also feed into the expectations of the New Urban Agenda that is to be formulated.

Seven themes for country reports for Habitat III

- Urban demographic issues and challenges
- Land and urban planning
- Environment and urbanization
- Urban governance and legislation
- Urban economy
- Housing and basic services
- Indicators





These reports are essentially baseline overviews that may or may not unlock deep and meaningful debate at a country and city level. A lot depends on the level of investment African governments have put into the establishment of active National Urban Policy Forums where the range of stakeholders debate and refine the contents and analysis of the country reports. However, there is a deeper problem. Due to the formal nature of these processes and the categories and sub-categories that must be used in preparing these reports, it becomes almost impossible to break conceptually with sectoral silos such as slum upgrading, public transport and public health and it is not feasible to address the wicked problems that affect the peculiar dynamics of urbanisation in Africa as elaborated before.

To illustrate, here are a number of difficult questions that confront all African countries, cities, leaders and residents that get obscured when the checklist of the formal reporting process is addressed:

- Should new town property developments aimed at attracting international capital and elites be allowed if the majority of the population will never afford to live there, and these schemes could suck completely dry what little public investment resources there are?
- Should basic services such as water, sanitation and energy be provided on a subsidised basis so that everyone can benefit in the short- and medium-term even if it means there are not resources available to invest in higher-order infrastructures such as broadband, bus rapid-transit systems and convention centres?
- Should substantive planning, regulation and taxation powers be devolved to local authorities if there is a deficit of skills?
- Should mall-centred suburban development patterns be allowed when most African cities are already suffering the cost and pollution problems associated with uncontrolled sprawl?
- Should foreign land and infrastructure investment be curtailed, regulated, taxed or promoted and incentivised?

None of these questions has an easy or definitive answer but they go to the heart of the debates that should be raging at national, local and regional forums if an African-centric and resonant paradigm of urban development is going to evolve. In order to open up a space for real discussions about the real challenges associated with urbanisation in Africa, we now explore a more grounded conceptual framework to analyse and debate the continent's unique urban management imperatives with an eye on an appropriate institutional architecture suited to optimise its urban future. These are issues that must be raised by Africans in the Habitat III process.



## CONCEPTUAL FRAME: SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

It is impossible to argue with the normative framing of sustainable urban development as set out in the Habitat Agenda. However, the real challenge is to figure out how to implement this amidst the series of interlocking dynamics of distorted urbanisation across Africa. This section provides a potential way of thinking and imagining to implement sustainable urban development in Africa.<sup>43</sup>

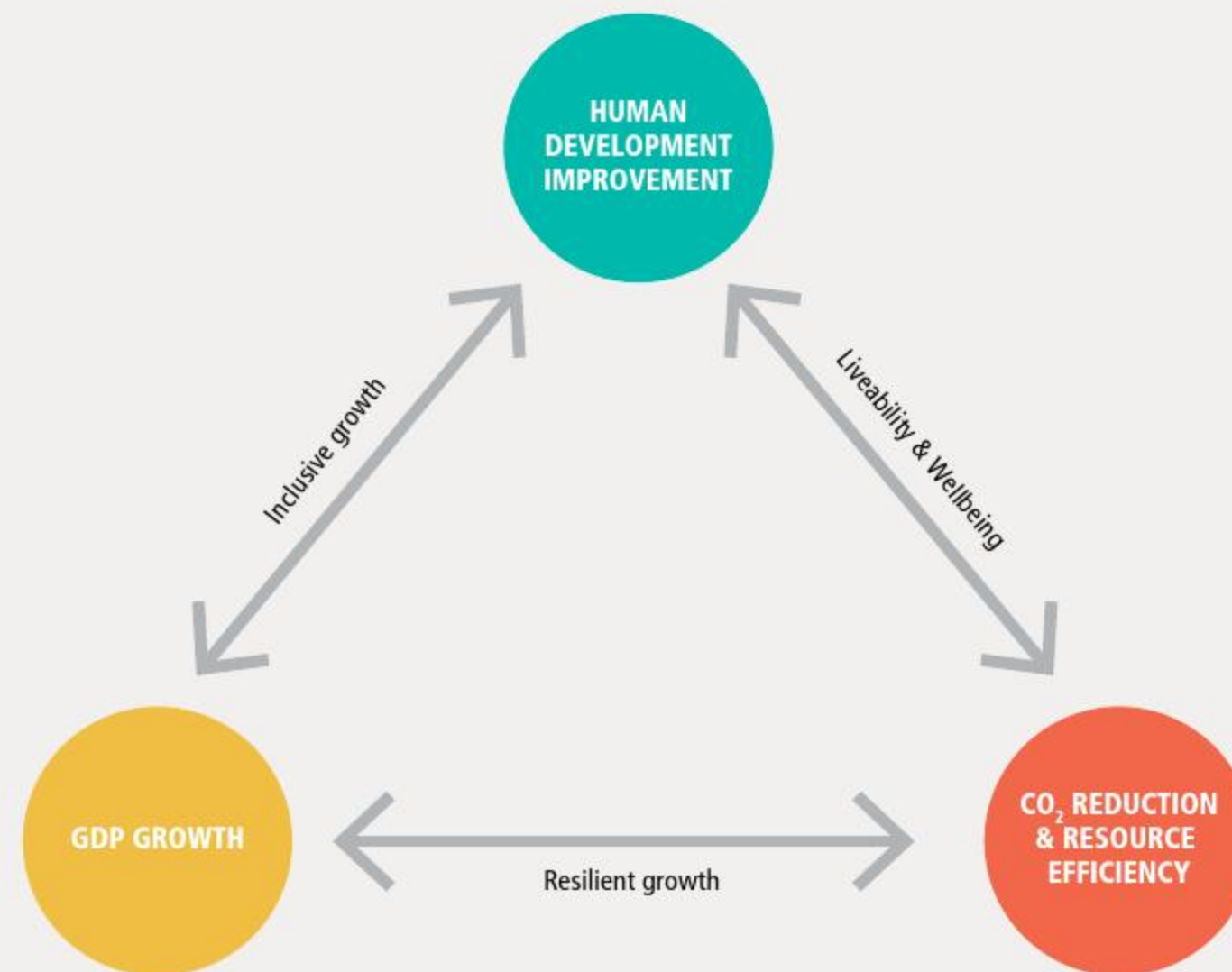
### Macro Development Frame (Global, Continental & National)

The starting point is the macro development imperative that must be realised at multiple scales because cities are shaped by global, regional and national as well as local forces. The New Urban Agenda outlines the global policy ambitions for cities, the 2063 Agenda covers a regional perspective but it is the national scale that is often pivotal in determining the future of cities and regions as well as their integration with their rural hinterlands. This is generally true but there are also important exceptions. Certain cities and regions, especially ones central to extractive economies, are inserted into globalised value chains that give the urban government a particularly strategic positioning. Figure 8 provides a diagrammatic illustration that national development strategies need to pursue simultaneously inclusive growth, resilient growth, human development and generalised well-being as manifest in liveable communities and settlements.

At the moment, most African countries are arguably fixated on GDP growth in any form or shape, even if it does not necessarily generate large numbers of new jobs or is environmentally damaging. The high rates of poverty and the small revenue coffers of African governments drive this pattern. The problem of limited revenue is of course part of a much larger and complex set of issues pertaining to the legacy effects of short- and wrong-sighted structural adjustment policies that dominated public policy preferences for more than two decades since the 1980s. However, a narrow fixation on GDP growth is not good enough and will in the long run undermine Africa's larger ambitions as encapsulated in the Agenda 2063 vision.

Inclusive growth points to the imperative of establishing economic growth trajectories that are highly labour absorptive and afford access to decent work. This is a particularly difficult objective in a context of slow growth that is often decoupled from intensive job creation, except of course for the fast-growing Asian economies. However, for most African countries the difficulties are greater because national economies tend to be small and are adversely inserted into globalised value chains where the terms of exchange are not favourable, which denotes their limited bargaining power. Furthermore, these economies are often overly reliant on a single commodity, such as oil or diamonds, which places the national fiscus at continual risk. It is, therefore, vital



**FIGURE 8:** AFRICA'S MACRO DEVELOPMENT FRAME (CONTINENTAL AND NATIONAL)<sup>44</sup>

*Source:* Recasting Urban Sustainability in the South, 2011

that African governments and citizens debate how these structural obstacles can be overcome in a context of a commitment to greater regionalism, intra-regional trade and endogenous industrialisation to supply the goods and services of the domestic populations. Cities can kick start these debates and efforts need to be given pride of place in these debates.

Resilient growth refers to the growing debate on the green economy as the necessary gateway to a low-carbon and resource-efficient future.<sup>45</sup> This imperative refers to the need to change the nature of both production and consumption so to radically reduce the harmful emissions associated with economic churn and, more important, delink each unit of economic output from non-renewable resource inputs.<sup>46</sup>



These are tough requirements for African economies that are predominantly reliant on extractives for trade and foreign exchange. Yet, as the world inches towards a global carbon trading and taxation regime and more stringent environmental standards linked to trade agreements, future economic competitiveness will depend on getting this right. The potential advantage for African countries of the new post-2015 focus on resilience is that the relatively low levels of economic development means that these systems

are not yet locked into unsustainable pathways.<sup>47</sup> Since so many economic systems need to still be constructed, there is an unprecedented opportunity to use the massive infrastructure-build imperative in African cities and regions as a catalyst for embedding the green economy.<sup>48</sup> However, this opportunity will only be optimised if there is a profound shift in the imagination of African elites so that they stop regarding the established Northern model of urbanism as what needs to be transplanted into Africa as a badge of modernity.

Neither inclusive nor resilient growth is possible if Africa's human potential remains untapped and under-invested. Education and health are the two most important drivers of human capital formation, along with social safety nets as the economy of a country expands.<sup>49</sup> The skills and knowledge of the urban workforce are a central determinant of the dynamism and long-term durability of growth.

However, optimally functioning schools and health systems are highly dependent on the quality of the social and public fabric where they are embedded. If a neighbourhood is unsafe, wracked by social conflicts and unhealthy public environments, it is highly unlikely that public institutions will function effectively. It is, therefore, imperative to understand that national human development goals must be connected to a holistic approach of strengthening education, health and welfare institutions within the community contexts where they are nested.



 People walk and cycle along promenade on "Golden Mile" beach front in Durban, South Africa.

© Icswart / Shutterstock





There is a lot to discuss and clarify about how these imperatives can be pursued at community level. We need a proliferation of models and experiments to conduct area-based planning and management that can optimise human capital investments and foster better social protection. Many Africans, exposed to the uncertainties of the urban economy, still have had to depend on rural connections as a safety net in times of hardship and for their old age.

It is not easy or obvious how a country or city decides on the most optimum policy mix to achieve inclusive and resilient growth along with greater liveability simultaneously. However, unless policy options and investment choices are evaluated in terms of the inevitable tensions between these imperatives, it is impossible to achieve transformative development.

## From Macro to Urban

An explicit and intelligent place-based lens on public investment can greatly improve the chances of African countries finding the most appropriate balance or coordination between the imperatives of inclusive growth, resilient growth and human wellbeing.

There are three over-arching considerations that must inform and anchor democratic debates about how best to develop and manage African cities and towns:

- Optimise urban form to become appropriately dense,<sup>50</sup> green and just
- Calibrate urban infrastructure networks and systems to ensure a sustainable metabolic flow of money, resources, goods, services, people and data

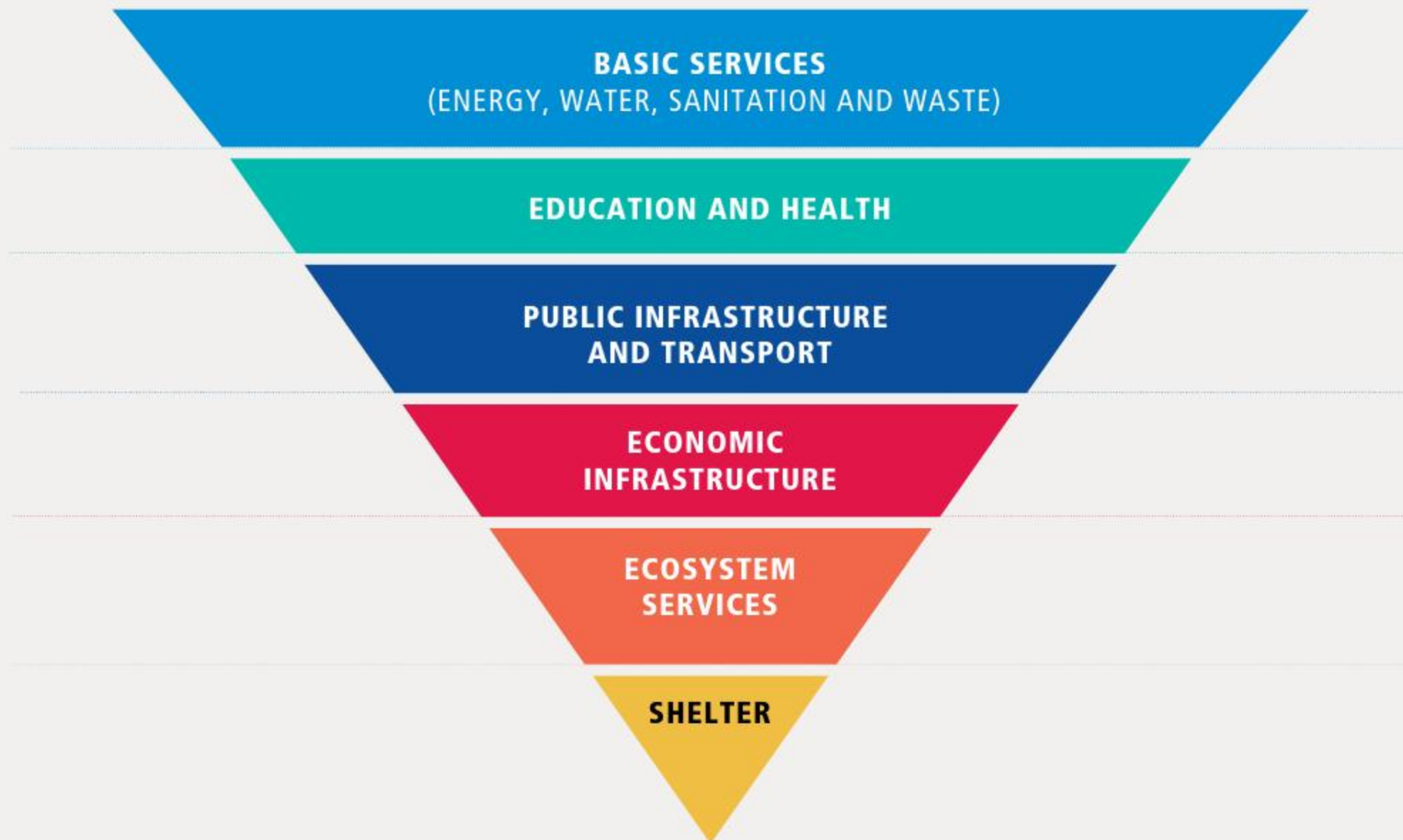
- Accelerate economic development through strategic infrastructure investments (especially energy and mobility), appropriate planning regulations, institutional coordination and the provision of useful information

Given the complexity of the variables at play in each of these fields of governance, and the plurality of actors implicated, every urban government must be given the right and support to formulate long-term strategic action plans that explain how these imperatives will be addressed. These long-term frameworks should become the linchpin for negotiations about the role of urban governments in the national development effort and associated questions about sensible devolution of powers, functions and the concomitant fiscal powers.

They can also be the basis for rolling engagements with organised civil society, the private sector and citizens. Most important, locating urban development in a wider frame will compel urban leaders (and national governments where they are the dominant public sector players) to be more explicit about the rationale behind their investment strategies.

Figure 9 provides an illustration of a hierarchy of nested investments that would make sense in a typical African setting marked by high levels of residential and economic informality combined with low levels of income per capita. The logic behind this hierarchy is that the basic needs of all urban residents must be the number one priority over everything else and this goes to the heart of fundamental well-being and dignity.<sup>51</sup>



**FIGURE 9:** CONCEPTUAL HIERARCHY OF INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

*Source:* Authors own tabulation

This is followed by key investments to optimise the capabilities of all residents. In a knowledge-driven globalised economy, this imperative is becoming more important if people are to access employment, which in turn is the fundamental driver of household wellbeing and social mobility. Since the majority of African urban dwellers live in slums which are extremely dense, and marked by over-crowding, it is

essential that the public realm (the street and key social and mobility nodes) is optimised as a social space, economic arteries and primary cultural domain.<sup>52</sup> If this is combined with a concerted public transport and mobility strategy, it can unlock the profound potential of all cities and towns. In this sense the predominantly informal economic practices in large swathes of African cities can be used as a resource and optimised.





Building on top of an activated public realm is a commitment to optimise logistical infrastructures that can enhance and diversify urban economic life. It is vital to underscore that a holistic understanding of the economy is critical. Informal economies and everyday livelihood practices are the dominant modes of economic life in most sub-Saharan African cities.

Furthermore, the formal and informal systems are inter-dependent and will have to grow in tandem for some time to come given Africa's structural legacy of economic underdevelopment and limited education opportunities. Resolving the formal informal dichotomy is less important than preventing fiscal leakage and corruption and fostering overall urban system legibility and transparency.

After the economy, ecosystem services must be addressed. As intimated in the Agenda 2063 discussion document, blue and green economic sectors can become the fundamental underpinning of the African economy over the next few decades. This potential will only be harnessed if local authorities and citizen realise that the restoration and protection of natural ecosystem services is vital to their well-being, a sense of community and the overall quality of life of the urban system as a whole. Most importantly, large numbers of public works opportunities can be shaped around ecosystem services restoration, which is the missing conveyor belt that African urban economies need to move the youth into the labour market and entrepreneurship.

In this schema, shelter investments come last. This is obviously contrary to the way in which the urban development agenda was framed in 1996 at Habitat I or affirmed with the focus on slums at Habitat II. However, this approach does not diminish the importance of consolidating the right to housing, but rather confirms that urban majorities need support with the enabling armatures of urban life whilst they take care of the shelter needs, even if in a makeshift manner.

The Latin American and Asian contexts have demonstrated that improvements in the public realm prove much more important to the wellbeing and livelihoods of poor households than starting off with public housing provision. It all boils down to how one can optimise the return on investment of every cent spent in the urban realm.

## Urban Service Delivery Strategies and Investment Portfolios

It is self-evident that local authorities or national departments cannot address the intractable challenges of African cities on their own. As invoked by the early iterations of the Habitat Agenda, they have to work through partnerships with the private sector and civil society to ensure both legitimacy for their investment choices and synergy between the disparate actions across these sectors.<sup>53</sup> Local authorities also have to invest in the empowerment of these sectors so that the engagement can be substantive and meaningful.



Building on this prescript of the Habitat Agenda, it is important to become more specific. In light of the proposed investment hierarchy discussed above, and the need to calibrate investments to achieve optimal sequencing and cumulative impact, it is important to propose how this can be done.

At the urban scale, each local authority must produce a clear service delivery model that explains how the service will be rendered and maintained; the standard of the service; the cost of the service in relation to a given standard; the income, expenditure and cross-subsidisation of the service to attain the standard and progressively, universal coverage. Developing a service delivery model that is made transparent will require intense discussion between the all spheres of government, particularly local government and society.<sup>54</sup> To avoid elite capture or narrow growth assumptions, it is important to establish three fundamental criteria for negotiations about the service delivery model: affordability, quality and universal access. (See Figure 10)

**FIGURE 10: EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR DECIDING LEVEL OF SERVICES**







In light of the extent of urban poverty, vulnerability and low incomes, it is imperative that a given city's service delivery model address how the affordability criteria will be met in the short and long-term. However, a singular focus on affordability could generate a situation where the local authority abdicates responsibility for considering the quality of the service and allow a range of private actors to deliver the service with no minimum standards, contract enforcement or opportunities for recourse.

To avoid this, it is important to clarify what the expected quality of a service or piece of infrastructure will be. Again, the Latin American experience is instructive. The Colombian cities that have seen a convincing turnaround in fortunes during the past two decades have all taken quality considerations very seriously, especially in their most deprived areas. Africa can learn from the multiplier benefits of this approach.

However, in light of the massive service and infrastructure deficits in much of sub-Saharan Africa, it is equally important to spell out when all urban residents will gain access to a given a service and how these processes of

service extension are factored into the overall service delivery model. The debates on affordability and access will compel an honest engagement with the vast informal systems of delivery that step into the breach in most African cities where the state is yet to deliver and to the selection of the most appropriate technologies for universal coverage. There is now a considerable body of evidence that coming to terms with the so-called informal systems of service delivery is vital to improve access to basic services progressively and to establish a viable fiscal model.

Any long-term agenda to consolidate sustainable urban development in Africa will have to address the governance and institutional questions of how to knit together the formal, private and informal private systems in ways which grow the local economy, enhance livelihoods and wellbeing and establish an efficient urban form and metabolism. This can be made more practical through city- and neighbourhood-level deliberations about appropriate service delivery standards and modalities. Doing this assumes there is a coherent national and local institutional architecture to deliberate upon and practice effective urban management.



# 06

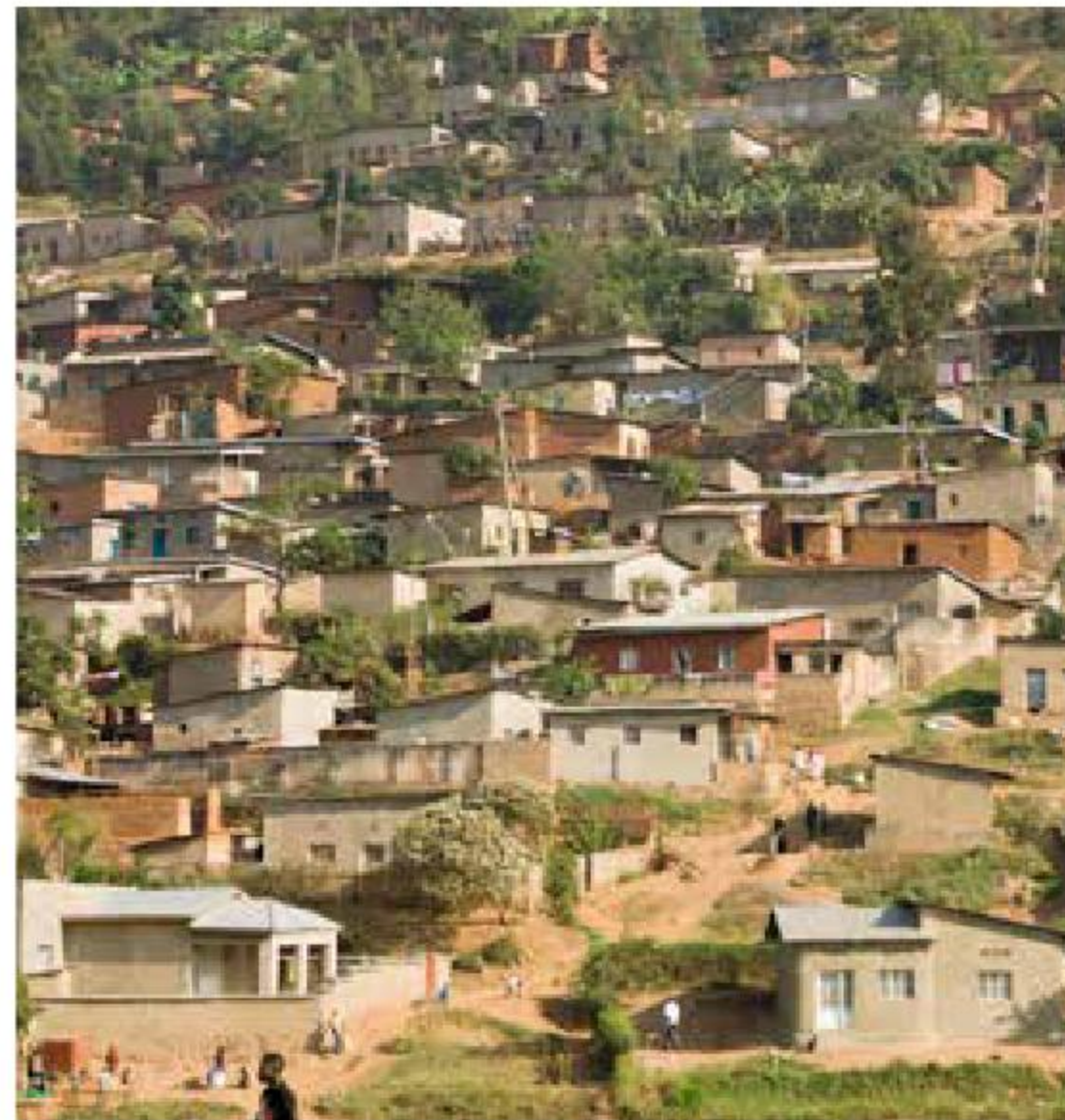
## INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE TO OPTIMISE AFRICA'S URBAN FUTURE

It is obvious that those who live in and manage African cities need to drive the global conversation about what sustainable urban development means in practice. Furthermore, the real-life innovations to achieve sustainable urbanism will come from the ground and cascade upwards. Technocratic top-down programmes and solutions will not work because each city and town is unique and will need to draw on the collective resources of all actors affected to produce fit-for-purpose reforms. That said, local innovations become a lot easier if there is a coherent and high profile national programme of deliberation and action to drive systematic urban transformation.

National governments have substantial political, institutional and fiscal resources that can stimulate and enable urban innovation. In this section we summarise the minimum elements of a national urban policy system, led by national governments in close partnership with the relevant local government association, civil society organisations, the private sector and knowledge institutions. The following suite of institutions is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for effective urban management and transformation.

Local action, experimentation and learning that is buttressed by a broader national system that is sensitive to the imperatives of the changes ushered in by urbanisation and urban growth will contribute

to solving national and city challenges. In fact, even though it might appear as if there is a natural hierarchy of national urban policies shaping local actions, in most contexts it is more likely and desirable that there is a dynamic interplay between national indicative policies and locally defined priorities that feed into the national agenda.



 Kigali, Rwanda. © Shutterstock





## National Urban Policy

During the past decade, the importance of explicit National Urban Policies have strongly come to the fore<sup>55</sup> and now forms part of the reporting by member states of the United Nations in the lead up to Habitat III. At its core, these policies seek to understand and manage urban growth and decline across the national territory with an eye on cross-border dynamics and processes. In this sense they are fundamentally data-driven and evidence-based. This form of global reporting requires national statistical agencies to be centrally involved in order to progressively improve a dynamic spatial perspective of key national trends with regard to the economy, people, landscape, infrastructure, environment and the flows of goods and services. These policies are rooted in the desire of governments to adopt a territorial approach in national and local planning, especially since urban and rural economies and environments are so intertwined.

New policy insights on the spatial dynamics of economic development — referred to as agglomeration dynamics in the 2009 World Development Report — demonstrate how important place dynamics are in an increasingly globalised economy premised on knowledge and the clustering of talent and markets.<sup>56</sup> To ensure effective and targeted national development, it is essential to understand the unique agglomeration dynamics of all economic sectors, especially the globally-organised value chains that criss-cross all dimensions of the modern economy. Critically, we now know that these territorial dynamics are not unique to the formal economy but play an equally vital role in informal and criminal economies.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, for African countries marked by complex interdependencies between the formal and informal economies, it is particularly important to catalogue and analyse the place-based dynamics of the local, national and regional economy. It can make all the difference between modest and robust economic growth.

Large urban agglomerations like the Gauteng city-region, the greater Cairo-Alexandra conurbation and the West African belt from Abidjan to Accra (taking in Lagos of course) all point to the regional dynamics of Africa's primary economic hubs. Put differently, National Urban Policies can demonstrate how primary economic hubs are in fact the springboards for the larger African regional integration project promoted in Agenda 2063. On the other hand, these policies could also raise awareness about how large metropolitan centres in the national economy connect with secondary cities and rural economies through a multiplicity of connections and interdependencies.

It is in this regard that the African Union and Regional Economic Communities will have to work closely with member states because the cross-border city-regional economies will be the backbone of the African sub-regions. More to the point, the new industrial strategy for Africa to realise the goals of Agenda 2063 will have to be anchored spatially in these primary economic hubs that require cross-border coordination and synergy. National Urban Policies will be useful to translate these agendas into the national context and back-up into the sub-regional and continental forums.





 *Idanre Town in Ondo state, Nigeria.* © Shutterstock

On the basis of such a differentiated understanding of the national territory, National Urban Policies create a national consensus for an appropriately differentiated model of urban governance and management. In other words, in most African countries it is inappropriate to expect small towns with micro-economies and populations below 50,000 to look and operate like a secondary city or a metropolitan hub. National and provincial or district governments have to play a far more active role in these smaller geographies, whereas it

often makes sense to pursue substantive functional and fiscal decentralisation for metropolitan areas and to a lesser extent, secondary cities. Ideally, National Urban Policies should spell out the rationale for staggered or differentiated decentralisation as institutional capabilities of local authorities expand. For these policies to make an impact, they should set out and monitor the implementation of a systematic fiscal and legislative reform agenda.





## Legislative Reform Agenda

The Planning Sustainable Cities global report of UN-Habitat established that post-independence Africa has not pursued urban planning and land-use reform with enough vigour.<sup>58</sup> In fact, much of Africa remains wedded to culturally-inappropriate and outdated planning laws and associated town planning and zoning schemes. However, this does not only apply to urban planning. Sectoral infrastructure planning and regulation such as transport, energy, waste management suffer from similar problems. Engineering norms and standards that hark back to the colonial era and/or the European context are taken for granted and serve as the basis of both investment and under-investment.

At one level this is inappropriate due to affordability challenges as explained before. On another level, the old-style assumptions and practices come from an era that failed to understand social and environmental externalities such as pollution. Thus, the new urban paradigm that promotes greater urban compaction, public infrastructure and participatory slum upgrading as invoked by AMCHUD<sup>59</sup> will never come to pass unless there is substantial legislative reform to reorient key sectors of the built environment but, most important, to enable more integrated modalities of investment and urban management. The institutional linchpin of an effective national urban management system must be local government. It is essential that legislative reform promotes an appropriate and substantive decentralisation agenda.

## Decentralisation Support Programme

Decentralisation has been on the lips of policy makers at least since the early 1990s. With the momentum established by the intensified commitment to democratic decentralisation in the Habitat Declaration, many African governments have paid lip service to decentralisation but the implementation has been disappointing. A number of studies confirm that most sub-Saharan African countries have a poor track record in implementing full-blown decentralisation with a few exceptions, the most notable being South Africa. In the past decade, as multi-party democracy has taken root, the growth of opposition political parties in large cities has seemingly further undermined national governments appetite for full decentralisation. One of the most remarked on trends in the recent past is that, in many key African cities, opposition political parties have either come into office as the majority party or represent a sizeable opposition.<sup>60</sup>

To date, there has not been a sufficiently nuanced discussion on democratic decentralisation that is informed by a strategic inter-governmental and inter-sectoral approach to urban development. The principle of subsidiarity is important but it would be absurd to treat large and small urban centres in the same manner.

Where local authorities have no tax base, small institutional footprints and limited planning and regulatory capacity, it makes complete sense for national governments and regional governments to play an active



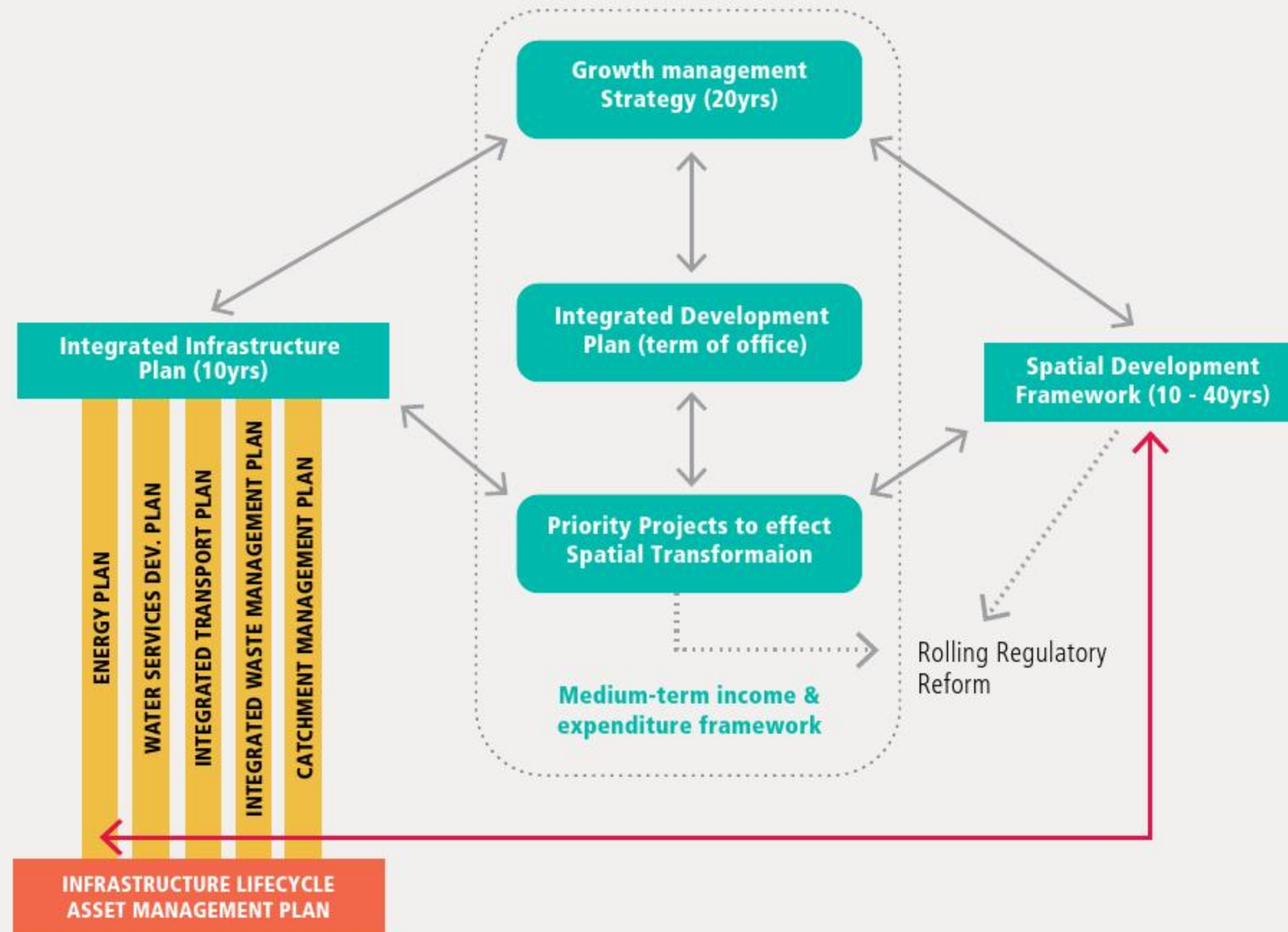
role in supporting and managing the area to ensure that basic universal rights are met. However, in larger cities that require on-the-ground intelligence and institutional reach, it is essential that decentralisation reforms are completed to ensure effective urban management.

The norms and guidelines for democratic decentralisation published by UN-Habitat in 2007 remain as salient as ever.<sup>61</sup> In most African contexts, achieving this level of decentralisation is not about the unbundling of national competencies but improving currently inadequate local state capacity.

Significantly, in the past year there has been major progress at a pan-African level to establish a more favourable political climate for decentralisation in line with the Guidelines for Democratic Decentralisation. In June 2014, the African Union's gathering of the Heads of State and Government of the Union adopted an African Charter on values and principles of decentralization, local governance and local development.<sup>62</sup> This has brought the pan-African policy environment in line with global norms. At the same conference, the Heads of State and Government also approved the creation of the High Council of Local Governments as an African Union institution. Its purpose is to reflect the voice of local governments in the deliberations of the Union. These two decisions are providing a new impetus for decentralisation and provide an excellent basis for driving reform across the continent.

It should be recognised that decentralisation must be linked to specific institutional capabilities at the local level that will ensure state legitimacy such as law, finance and skills. Figure 11 provides an illustrative overview of the key institutional building blocks that need to be in place for effective and adaptive urban management at the metropolitan scale. This is based on the conceptual approach discussed in Section 5. In other words, it is assumed that urban governments must take the lead in formulating a long-term vision and evidence-based strategy for the territory in a participatory and inclusive manner. This long-term agenda, focused on systemic change to establish a dynamic trajectory towards sustainable urban development, must be broken down into smaller chunks of planning that can shape the short- and medium-term priorities of elected local authorities that need to also adopt term-of-office plans. This strategic model seeks to harness the investment capital associated with major infrastructure sectors but roots it in a strong regional spatial development framework, which in turn will ensure the necessary connections are made between infrastructure and land-use management. Every aspect of this illustrative framework can be made transparent, participatory and adaptive. There is no need for blueprint planning or closed-door deal making.



**FIGURE 11:** INSTITUTIONAL ELEMENTS OF DECENTRALISED URBAN MANAGEMENT

**Source:** Adapted from *Draft Integrated Urban Development Framework, South Africa*<sup>63</sup>

It is important that the national decentralisation support programme is based on a commitment to empower local authorities to execute effective strategic management that can engage with long-term trends. Growth management strategies force urban governments to take a long-term view, based on rigorous economic analysis of the formal

and informal economies, and tied up with critical infrastructure investments, but always situated within a larger spatial development perspective. The investments for the term of office integrated development plan must then be derived from these larger policy agendas. Furthermore, it then becomes possible to identify



flagship projects that a mayor and other political leaders can champion without undermining the long-term trajectory for the city. It creates the possibility of overcoming the perennial problem of short-termism that stem from delivery imperatives of electoral cycles.

A lot of national support and investment will be required to migrate to this kind of approach. It will have to be designed in close collaboration with the national local association, municipal trade unions, traditional leaders, key urban investors and civil society organisations. However, whatever is agreed upon in a given country must have a sound financial component. This speaks to the importance of aligning the national fiscal strategy with the agenda of empowering local government.

### Research and Development System to Underpin Urban Innovation

There can be little doubt that it will take an extraordinary amount of political will, policy clarity, research, experimentation and resources to address the vast development challenges that beset most African cities and towns. Furthermore, if the goal is not just to ameliorate basic needs but also to unleash creative potential and energy, the knowledge requirements are even greater. At the moment, research investments seem to be restricted to the private sector, focussed on providing service delivery and real estate solutions that are usually inappropriate for most African urban settings. However, in the absence of alternative research and evidence, these perspectives often get traction at enormous cost to the city and country.

All African countries have national Research and Development (R&D) policies that seek to foster national innovation systems. The time has come to overhaul these research systems to adopt a more place-based understanding of economic development, innovation milieus, and strategic intermediation so that innovators can connect with policy makers, users and investors. Diverse city-based economies should become the primary focal point of R&D institutional investment in close collaboration with national and regional universities. It will be essential to elevate the role of design within the larger built-environment disciplines and professions because these are best placed to foster integrated problem-solving research and experimentation. The quicker African governments can empower their scientists, professionals and innovators to get to work on the future sustainable African city, the quicker African economies will become globally competitive. There is obviously enormous scope to establish regional and continental cooperation on the various issues that require R&D. UN-Habitat, AfDB, UNECA and AUC could cooperate to build this system as an outcome of Habitat III.

### Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning system

The rich and the poor, the public and private sectors, professionals and lay people are inextricably bound together in Africa's cities. Deep urban governance reform as suggested in this report creates the appropriate mechanisms for deliberation, moderated conflict, cooperation, co-production and mutual learning so that



the best possible decisions are taken in the development of cities. However, since the current system favours certain interests and marginalises the powerless, it is important to create a more level playing field that can also enhance accountable and responsive government.

A combination of increasingly-affordable mobile telephony, digital maps, the proliferation of bespoke applications and cultures of crowd-sourcing create ideal conditions for social learning. A key tenet of new public management reforms of the 1990s was an obsession with targets and indicators. This culture lives on in the ongoing proliferation of composite indices such as the Resilient Index that was canvassed at the last World Urban Forum among many others. There is a place for these measures and the high level metrics of the Sustainability Development Goal, but it is more important to identify what is meaningful for a local community and city and to track the performance of the government and its partners in relation to those priorities.

In this regard the turn to community enumeration and Google maps by various urban social movements offers an opportunity to connect official monitoring and indicators with community-driven processes to improve the reach and quality of service delivery. To have durable impact, however, the process and knowledge generated through these mechanisms need to feed into a variety of forums where diverse urban actors come together to deliberate and act in concert. Through demand-driven monitoring of performance, cultures of responsiveness, excellence and continuous improvement can be established.

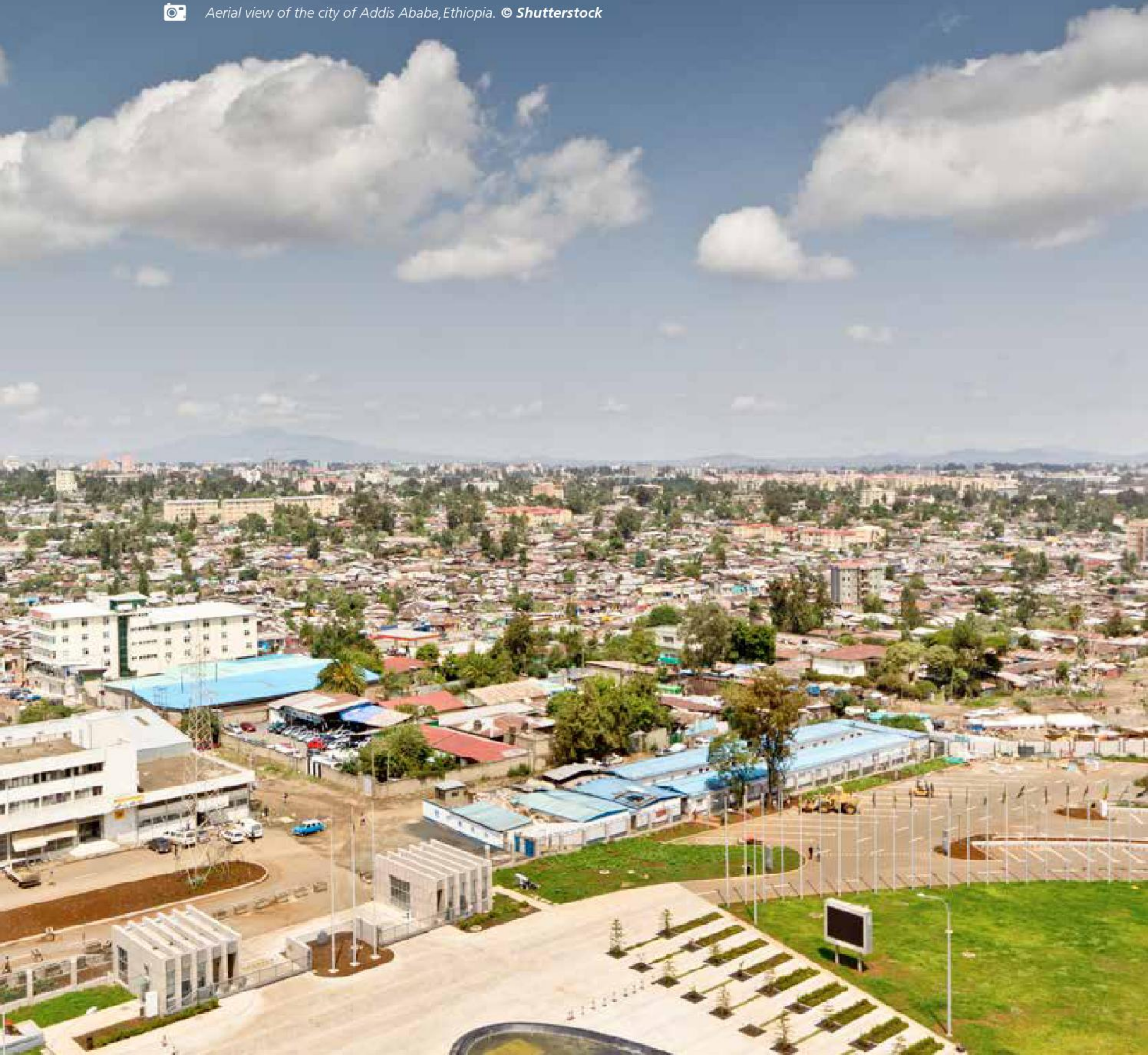


 Harare, Zimbabwe. © Ulrich Mueller Shutterstock

In summary, if African governments are going to utilise the Habitat III preparatory processes effectively, it is vital that each country creates a national debate on what the national institutional system for effective urban governance and management should look like. This section outlined some of the essential ingredients of such a system as a provocation or resource for reflection and debate. Each country will adopt its own approach, one which may or may not include these elements, but the point is that the global discussion around Habitat III offers an opportunity for Africans to bring greater coherence to national and local processes to improve urban performance.



 Aerial view of the city of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. © Shutterstock







## 07

## NEXT STEPS



 View of city center of Cairo, Egypt. © Leonid Andronov/ Shutterstock

Preparations for Habitat III are well on their way. In 2014 African Member States compiled country reports in the run up to the first Prep Comm in New York in September. A refined version of these reports are currently underway in order to be presented at the 25<sup>th</sup> Governing Council and Prep Comm II in Nairobi in April 2015. This will lay the foundation for the debates that are necessary to formulate an unified African perspective in the three potentially paradigm shifting processes, the finalization of the Sustainable Development Goal processes due to be finalised in September 2015, the Paris COP meeting in December 2015 and Habitat III in Quito in October 2016.

Other continental processes such as the AfriCities Summit 7 in December 2015 will serve as convening moments where the final components of the African Urban Agenda can be agreed before the final Prep Comm meeting and Habitat III itself. These all need to be informed by regional preparation processes or conferences designed to enable participation in such processes. It is hoped that, on the back of local and country debates informed by this background report, Africa's preparations will become more substantive and urgent.



Africa's urban transition holds the key to the broader transformation agenda set out in *Agenda 2063*. Let us consider some of the key over-arching goals. Inclusive growth and sustainable development will fundamentally depend on how the primary sites of production and consumption, in terms of total economic output, are organised in terms of overcoming social and spatial divides so that everyone can potentially access economic opportunities. It will also depend how efficient the flow of resources, energy and data are through the urban system in order to sustain economic activity.

The millions of Africans who practice pan-Africanism by migrating from city to city across national boundaries are paving the way for how social and cultural integration could function. Instead of tolerating xenophobia, cities can be the true laboratories of pan-African solidarity and cross-cultural innovation. Also, the ideals of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law must be forged in the hurly-burly of Africa's cities otherwise they will never find root. Furthermore, African cities offer the necessary social thickness to construct these cultures through routinized systems of democratic community

management and urban governance. It is also in these settings that the new, youthful interpretation of Africa's cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics will be made manifest through art, culture and media. Lastly, robust African cities with a powerful reach in the globalised economy will become increasingly important in a new context of international relations in a multi-polar world.

In short, the potential and prospects of the Agenda 2063 vision hinges on how well Africa's cities and towns perform. If these cities embrace the Habitat III agenda and forge an African interpretation and practice, optimism for the future can be justified. However, this requires a sharper explication of what needs to be done, by whom and how the overall institutional architecture will cohere.

This background report serves as a resource for local, national and regional dialogues about what is at stake and what action is required for Africans to make a meaningful intervention. UN-Habitat will take the lead in distributing this resource and promoting continuous democratic dialogue until a grounded and inspiring vision of the African city presents itself.



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Urbanization presents an unprecedented opportunity to accelerate the Africa's transformation and capacity to respond to development challenges. The continent is currently the fastest urbanizing in the world and its urban population will almost double in the next two decades. The imperative of steering and guiding the urban growth process is thus a priority undertaking.

The report highlights key trends, policy imperatives and policy priorities for an African Urban Agenda in line with Agenda 2063. This is a timely undertaking at a time when the role of urbanization in sustainable development is widely acknowledged including in the context of the Post 2015 Development Agenda. The Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (HABITAT III) further provides a renewed opportunity for Africa's efforts to ensure an environmentally sound, socially just and economically inclusive urbanization paradigm.

HS/065/15E

ISBN: 978-99944-61-72-7

eISBN: 978-99944-62-72-8

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