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Capitalizing on Urbanization:

The Importance of Planning,
Infrastructure, and Finance for
Africa's Growing Cities

>> **ISSUE BRIEF** from the **AUTHOR**

Jérôme Chenal

Senior Scientist, Urban and Regional Planning Community,
Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne

Habitat III: What is the Agenda for African Cities?

Jérôme Chenal

The priority

Development in African cities today is not in the megacities of Kinshasa, Lagos, and Cairo, but in intermediate cities that are directly linked with their surrounding environment.

The next United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, Habitat III, will be held October 17-20, 2016 in Quito, Ecuador. Habitat III specifically aims to “reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable urbanization and focus on the implementation of a New Urban Agenda, building on the Habitat Agenda of Istanbul in 1996.”¹

The theme in Quito echoes past conferences: Habitat I in Vancouver recognized the consequences of rapid urbanization and the conditions necessary for sustainable human settlements; consideration of the importance of cities with regard to economic, demographic, and environmental equilibrium was in its infancy. The role of urbanization in national, regional, and even continental development was reaffirmed 20 years later, at the Istanbul Conference, with the adoption of an action plan.

This time, the implementation of a New Urban Agenda promoting all aspects of sustainable development (equity and shared prosperity in particular) will be proposed in Quito. The urban habitat is therefore the focus, as made evident by the conference’s slogan: “It is time to think urban.” But the conference cannot be exclusive: This thinking must include rural areas and intermediate cities, as well as large cities. Development in African cities today is not in the megacities of Kinshasa, Lagos, and Cairo, but in intermediate cities² that are directly linked with their surrounding environment.

Why is it important?

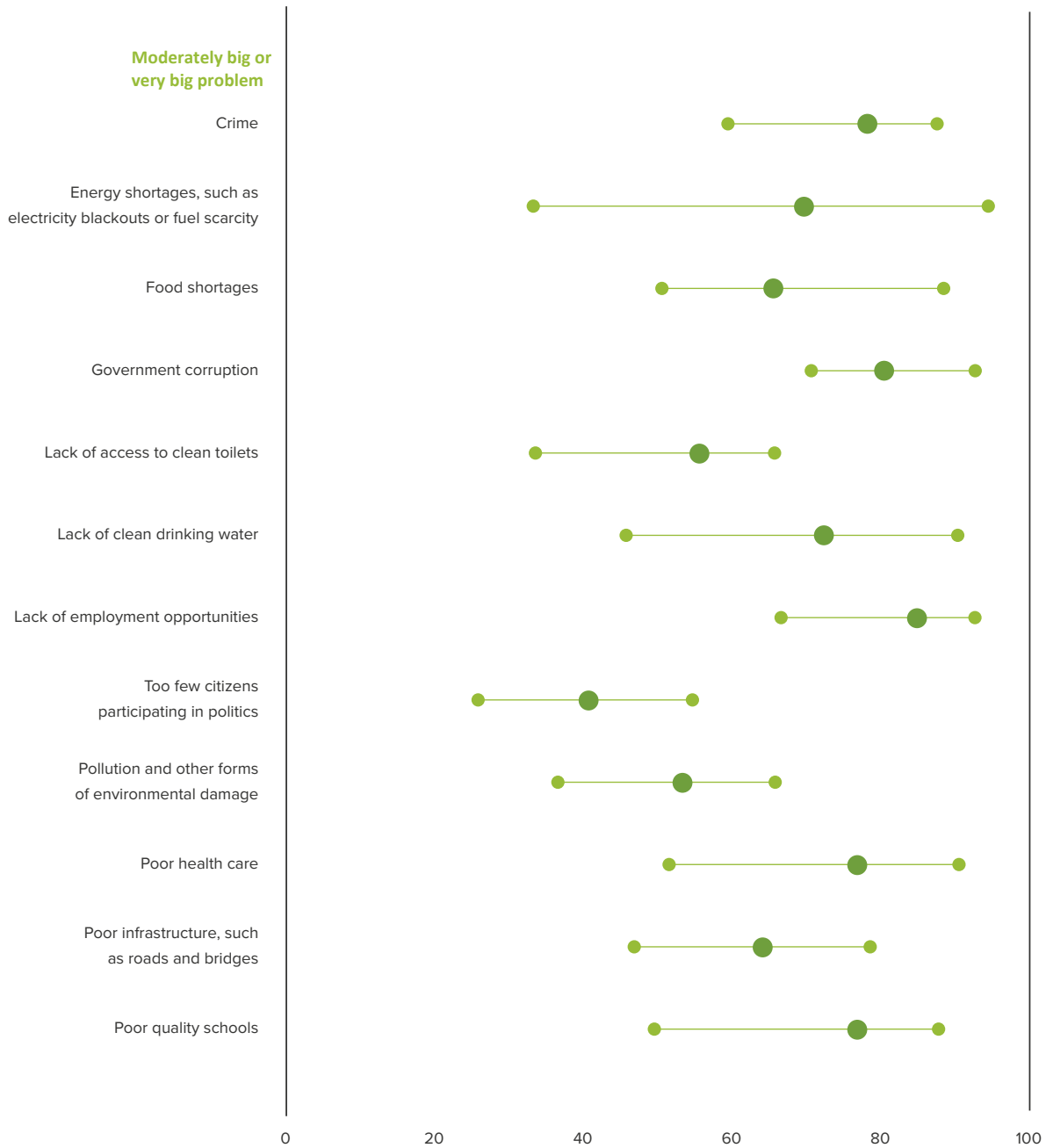
Although Habitat III addresses six main themes—1) social cohesion, equity, and livable cities; 2) urban frameworks; 3) spatial development; 4) urban economy; 5) urban ecology and environment and 6) urban housing and basic services—I will limit my discussion to the last point only.

¹ General Assembly of the United Nations. Resolution 66/207, Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), New York, March 14, 2012.

² Chenal, Jérôme. *African Cities: Introduction to urban planning*. MOOC, Coursera.org.

FIGURE 4.1. WORD FROM THE GROUND: IS THIS A VERY OR MODERATELY BIG PROBLEM IN YOUR COUNTRY?

Urbanization and rapid demographic change can be strong drivers of growth, but they also have the potential to exacerbate already pressing problems. Importantly, these problems often differ from country to country, with a few exceptions. The ranges (showing the minimum, maximum, and average) below demonstrate how much those responses differed among countries.



Source: Pew Research Center Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey. For more information, see <http://www.pewglobal.org>. Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the interpretations presented or conclusions reached based on analysis of the data.

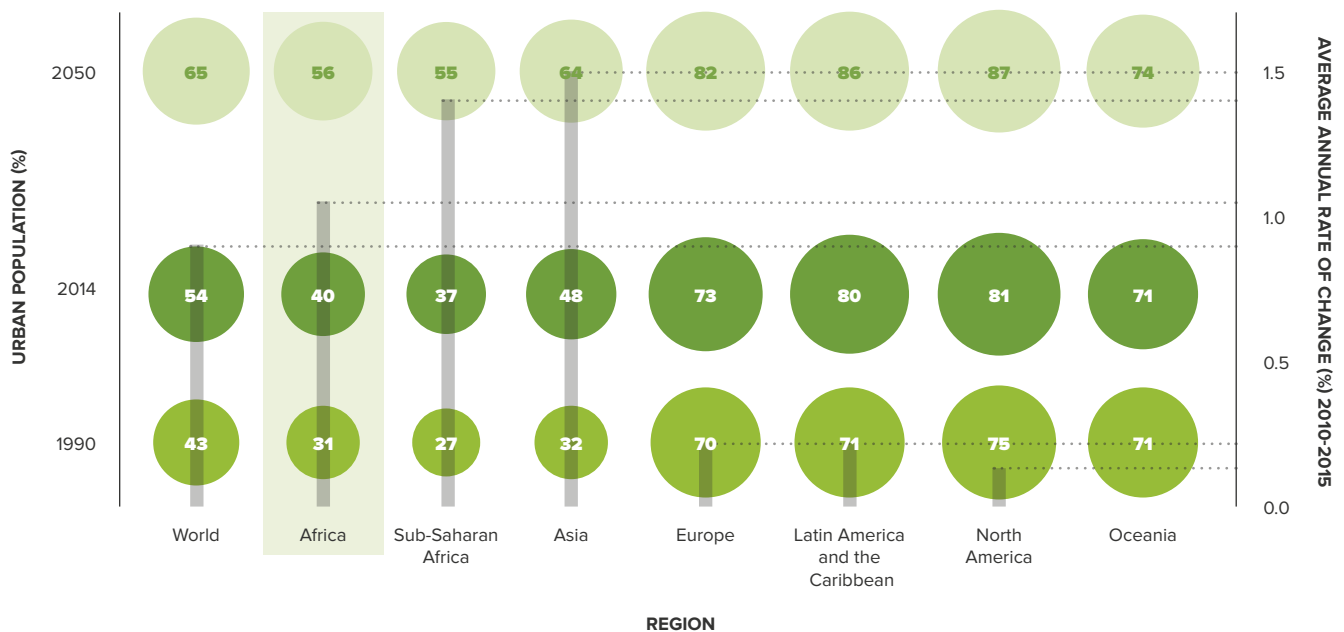
Note: The countries represented above include Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. Respondents were asked to rate each of the above problems on whether the problem was a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. The above visual shows the range among nine countries of their citizens answering “very big” or “moderately big” for each issue.

The growing demand for basic services in cities is directly linked to population growth and, in certain contexts, income growth. Thus, there is a strong relationship not only between population growth and the economy, but also between the population and its demand for services.

In order to provide these services and support economic development, cities must have the right social and physical infrastructure. Notably, the New Urban Agenda focuses on infrastructure not as physical structures but as networks of physical structures, knowledge, and institutions. Interdependence exists between the various infrastructures, forcing us to think in an inclusive, holistic way based on a systems-thinking approach. A sectoral approach, on the other hand, limits coordination between infrastructures within the same system, yet from different sectors, and in turn, stifles urban development.³ For example, the limits of a sectoral approach are quite clear in terms of mobility and transport.

FIGURE 4.2. AFRICA IS AMONG THE FASTEST URBANIZING REGIONS IN THE WORLD

Africa is urbanizing rapidly; in fact, faster than any other region except Asia. Despite this growth, even by 2050, sub-Saharan Africa will still be the least urbanized region in the world.



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2014). World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision, Highlights (ST/ESA/SER.A/352).

³ *Urban Infrastructure and Basic Services, including energy*. Habitat III Issue Papers, New York, N.Y.: Habitat III, 2015.

VIEWPOINT

GATEWAY TO AFRICA? THE GAUTENG CITY-REGION IN 2016 AND BEYOND

Joseph Parilla

Senior Research Associate, Metropolitan Policy,
Brookings Institution

Alan Berube

Senior Fellow and Deputy Director, Metropolitan
Policy, Brookings Institution

Rapid urbanization will define Africa's demographic future. History indicates that urbanization both accompanies and facilitates economic transition from agriculture to manufacturing and services, activities that tend to demand clusters of labor and capital, as well as proximity to other firms that cities provide. In turn, millions of Africa's rural residents have been and will continue to flock to urban regions in search of the living standards that new production and services jobs provide. However, this process is not pre-ordained: There are no wealthy countries that are not urbanized, but there are plenty of urbanized countries that are not wealthy.

How, then, can policymakers create urban environments that support economic growth and raise living standards for local households? In a recent report, we examined this question from the perspective of the relatively industrialized Gauteng City-Region—the 12.9 million person South African mega-metropolis anchored by Johannesburg. We find that the Gauteng City-Region has made significant progress over the past two decades. GDP per capita is nearly one-quarter higher today than in 2000. Educational attainment is up. The region is actually sub-Saharan Africa's most attractive destination for new foreign direct investment. In many ways, the Gauteng City-Region has assets that rival

other major global cities. Worryingly, however, productivity and GDP per capita growth have both slowed since 2010. High levels of unemployment (above 25 percent), income inequality, and social exclusion reflect the region's apartheid legacy, hindering progress towards full equality of opportunity and long-term economic competitiveness.

We find that the Gauteng City-Region can further bolster its position as "Gateway to Africa" in 2016 by embracing its services sector to promote trade and investment, enhancing technology commercialization in key sectors, boosting employability through improved connections between the worlds of school and work, and organizing public, private, and civic leaders around a shared vision for growth and competitiveness. Indeed, strategies are underway at the local, provincial, and national levels toward these ends. Gauteng province has launched a trade and investment plan that seeks to use the city-region as an export platform to sub-Saharan Africa. The City of Johannesburg has partnered with the Harambee Youth Accelerator to break down employment barriers for 200,000 disengaged youth. By taking these types of purposeful actions now, the Gauteng City-Region's public, private, and civic institutions can build a globally competitive economy that works for all, and perhaps serve as an example for the rest of Africa's emerging urban regions.

Today, a movement toward densification and “compact cities”—meaning dense urban areas with access to public transport, local services, and employment opportunities—dominates, as does the recognition of growing linkages between urban planning and transport. This movement requires fusion between expertise on transport and land use issues and investment programs.⁴ Densification is necessary for compact cities. In terms of regional development, the more compact a city is, the more sustainable it will be since smaller cities use less water and fewer road and public transport systems. This ability to economize on water, road, and transport infrastructure is only possible, however, by increasing the number of habitants per square kilometer. Thus, planning professionals are increasingly designing more sustainable compact cities and less sprawling ones.

In a similar vein, housing is once again on the agenda, even if it is clear that few governments have launched ambitious programs,⁵ instead leaving that task to private initiatives.

In 2010, 60 percent of the urban population in sub-Saharan cities lived in slums with no access to basic services, much less new technologies.

In contexts where economic resources are developing less rapidly than urban population growth, the tension between the two is clearly felt—especially when it comes to the important point on the urban agenda of “smart cities”⁶ and their evil twin, “informal settlements.”⁷ Smart cities are intelligent cities that take advantage of new technologies for more efficient management—a great deal of stock has been put in the idea that technology helps in the development of sustainable cities. Informal settlements, on the contrary, are inefficient due to poor management and lack of planning. In fact, the reality is that basic services are not accessible to most neighborhood residents. Thus, the economic development that serves as an urban development model in Western cities since the Industrial Revolution is confronted by the reality of extreme poverty and the gap between population growth and economic development. Indeed, according to the U.N., in 2010, 60 percent of the urban population in sub-Saharan cities lived in slums with no access to basic services, much less new technologies.

It therefore seems necessary to examine the issue of infrastructure in Africa from two angles: that of the compact city and that of the “average citizen.” Indeed, compact cities provide many benefits: For example, they decrease the amount of travel for their inhabitants, providing them the means to be mobile. In situations of extreme poverty, however, compact cities are less appropriate. Less dense cities allow for the development of urban agriculture.

⁴ *Transport and Mobility*. Habitat III Issue Papers, New York, N.Y.: Habitat III, 2015.

⁵ *Housing*. Habitat III Issue Papers, New York, N.Y.: Habitat III, 2015.

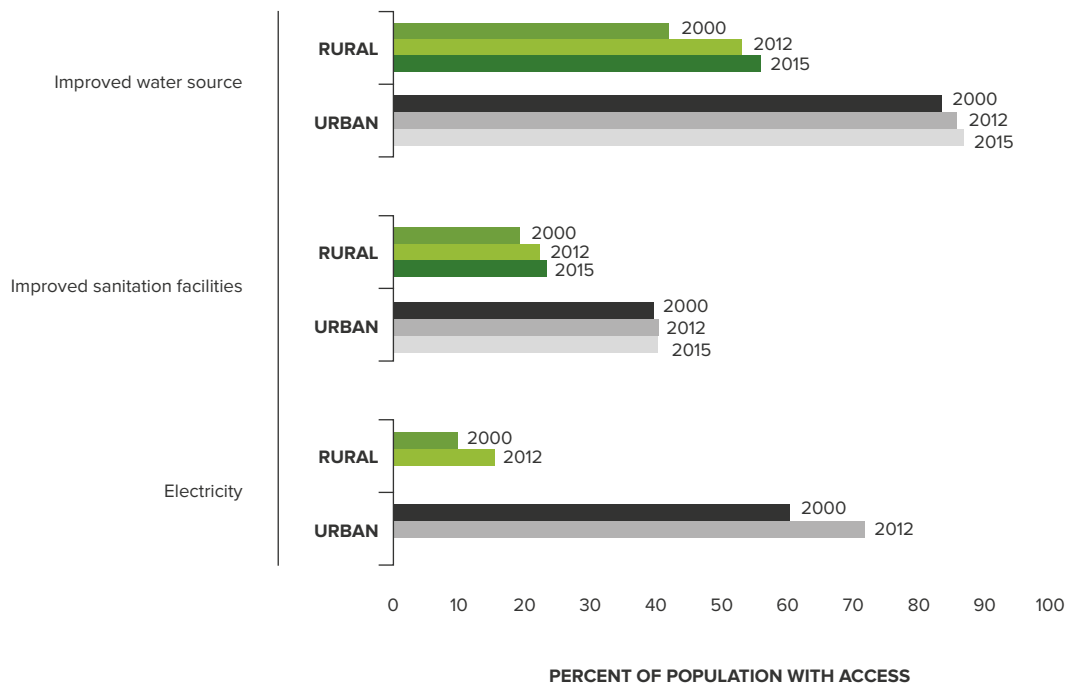
⁶ *Smart Cities*. Habitat III Issue Papers, New York, N.Y.: Habitat III, 2015.

⁷ *Informal settlements*. Habitat III Issue Papers, New York, N.Y.: Habitat III, 2015.

In addition, in our changing world, the compact city as a development model needs to be revisited in light of climate change, and the need for urban agriculture as a means of subsistence for the poor. Indeed, cities in hot, dry climates have long encouraged densification to protect from the sun. In these new hot, humid climates, however, rainwater must be infiltrated, especially in a context where storm events are becoming increasingly frequent and intense in parts of the world—meaning that urban agriculture is not suitable for the poor in compact cities. However, both types of cities share problems: For example, very low population density is costly in terms of energy, but so is a high population density.

FIGURE 4.3. RURAL DEVELOPMENT STILL LAGS BEHIND THAT OF URBAN AREAS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Though access to electricity, improved sanitation, and improved water sources have all increased in both urban and rural areas in the region, rural areas still significantly fall behind. Though sub-Saharan Africa continues to urbanize quickly, rural areas—which still house 63 percent of the region’s population—must not be ignored.



Source: World Development Indicators, accessed December 10, 2015.

There is therefore a middle ground that is not necessarily as dense as experts seem to think.

This reflection enables us to address the second angle, that of “average citizens.”⁸ These “typical client types” travel by public transport or car, are homeowners, and partake in leisure activities; in short, those for whom cities are planned. In the context of African cities, however, the average citizen is generally poor and a pedestrian. We must therefore understand who lives in cities and what their needs are, and not plan based merely on ideas. Today, African cities are designed and planned for a “resident-type” that, in reality, does not exist. It is like manufacturing a product that in no way corresponds to customers’ needs. And if, like with smartphones, it were possible to “create” a clientele, the latter must also be solvent. In the case of our cities, the so-called average resident-type does not have the means to access basic services, has much lower income, and is therefore not a potential “client” of the city as defined by planners.

What should be done in 2016?

The African stance on cities should therefore question the requirements of the compact city, as well as those of smart cities, and their implementation in a context where many residents live in poor neighborhoods.

In 2015 and 2016,⁹ 21 countries (representing one-third of the African population) will choose their presidents—hence there is a possibility of major renewal of commitment to cities. A new political balance conducive to integrating urban discourse in territorial development must be pursued. Politically speaking, 2016 will be followed by a very intense two-year period for the New Urban Agenda, implying great potential for change, as the conditions in many countries will be conducive. However, potential for change does not mean change.

This potential political renewal should not lead to an across-the-board adoption of the principles of Habitat III, but to a shared African vision based on the reality of African cities. To do this, we must make the inhabitants of cities the focus. The African stance on cities should therefore question the requirements of the compact city, as well as those of smart cities, and their implementation in a context where many residents live in poor neighborhoods.

⁸ Chenal, Jérôme. *The West-African City*. Lausanne: EPFL-Press, 2015.

⁹ Agbadje Adébayo Babatoundé, June 26, 2014, “2015-2016, années de grandes épreuves pour les démocraties en Afrique,” afro-moderne.mondoblog.org.

Cities have not yet been integrated into the political discourse. Habitat III is an opportunity to make towns and cities a national focus, due to the overwhelmingly alarming conditions in many countries. The current climate of political renewal should lay the foundations for reflection on the cities of tomorrow, pointing to a keen understanding of the role of cities in developing countries. As such, African cities can be appreciated in all their richness and diversity.

This opportunity can become a reality, but will the desire to make it happen be strong enough? In the recent history of cities few have been the occasions where political renewal and current affairs resulted in a paradigm shift. 2016 will open the door to new opportunities. But will they be seized?

LAGOS

10,788 | 13,121 | 18,857



CAIRO

11,031 | 11,943 | 14,740



KINSHASA

8,415 | 10,312 | 14,535



KHARTOUM

4,516 | 5,167 | 7,090



KANO

3,271 | 3,902 | 5,724



DAR ES SALAAM

3,415 | 4,399 | 7,276



JOHANNESBURG

3,763 | 4,114 | 4,732



NAIROBI

3,237 | 3,958 | 6,143



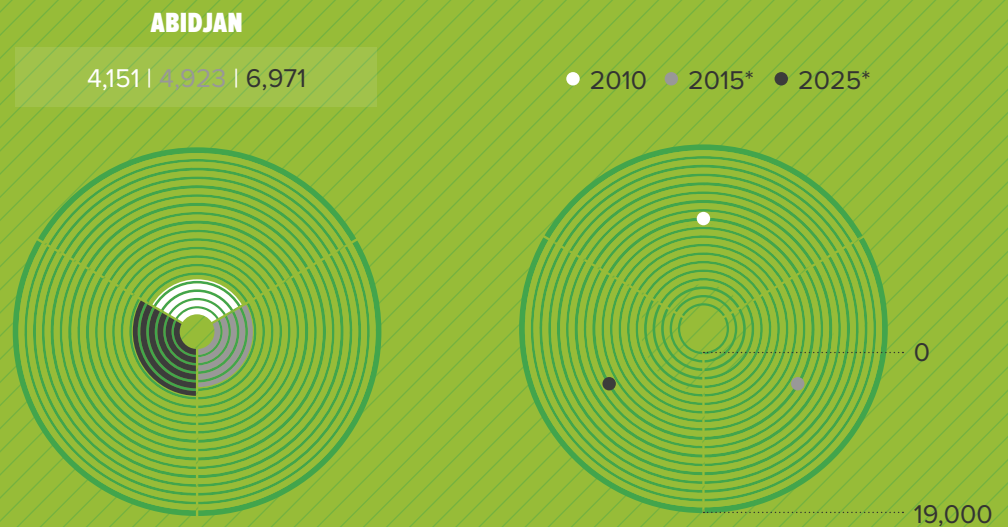
CAPE TOWN

3,492 | 3,610 | 4,388

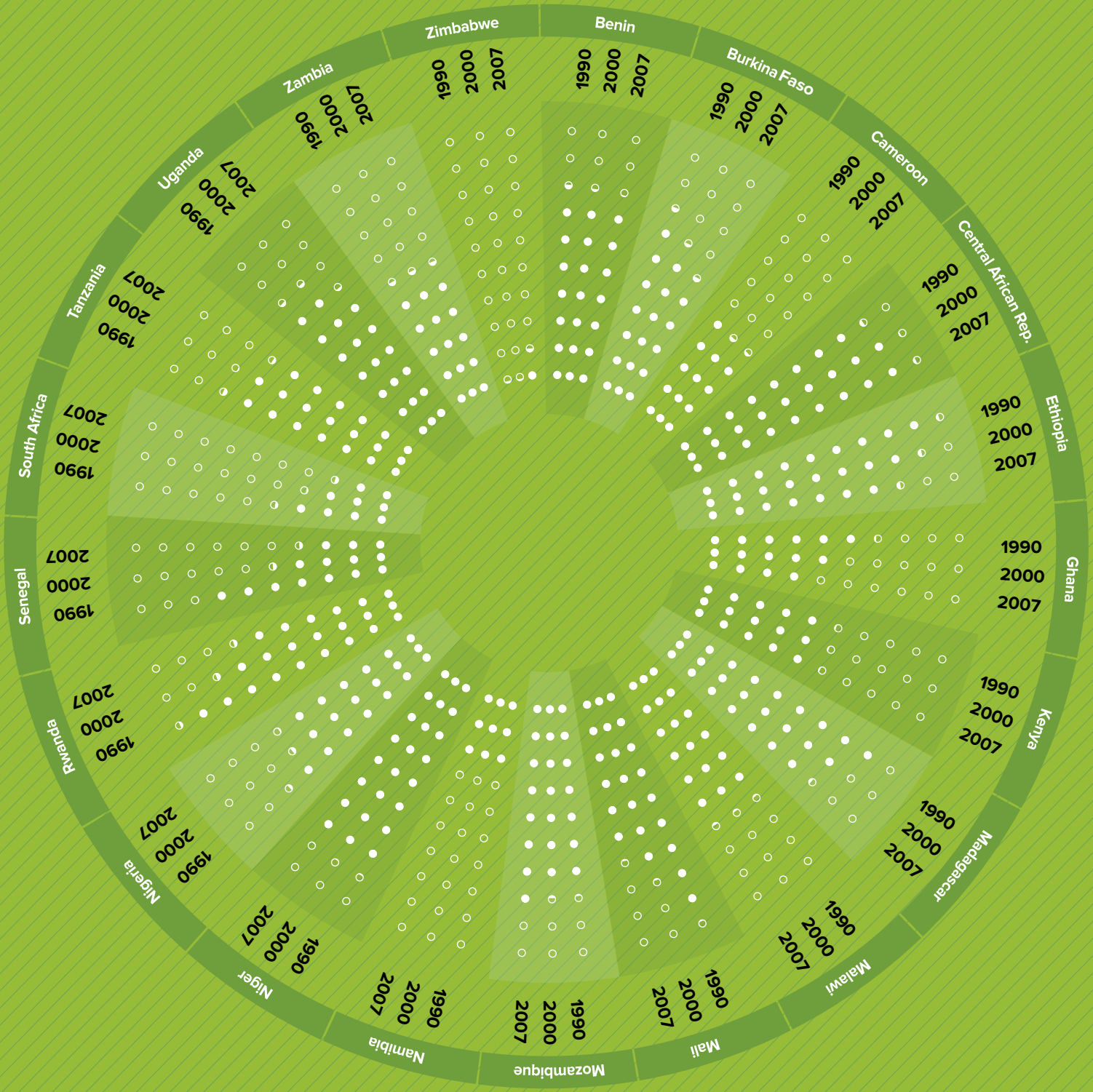


The rise of megacities

Shown here are the 10 biggest cities in Africa. Right now, three of them—Lagos, Cairo, and Kinshasa can be considered “megacities,” in that they have 10 million people or more. Within the next few decades, many other sub-Saharan and North African cities—for example, Johannesburg, Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam, Khartoum, Casablanca, and others—will reach that 10 million person threshold. Unsurprisingly, then, the total number of individuals living in Africa’s urban areas is expected to rise from 400 million in 2010 to 1.26 billion in 2025. The continent’s urbanization rate is also expected to reach 50 percent by 2035 and continue growing. This growth demonstrates a great need for better urban management and institution building.



Source: World Urbanization Prospects: The 2011 Revision, UNDESA, New York, 2012.
Note: * indicates projections. Populations shown in thousands of people.



Africa's struggle with slums

According to U.N. Habitat, approximately a third of individuals in urban areas in developing countries are thought to be living in slums. In Africa, this number is estimated to be over half of the urban population at 61.7 percent. Living in slums raises severe and dangerous challenges including poor health, the threat of crime, housing insecurity, and others. As these challenges arise, African governments will need to act fast in the aim to prevent their cities from becoming severely unmanageable and instead safe, healthy, and productive places to live. This image shows the percentage of people living in slums in select African countries. Though this is a large problem throughout Africa, it does vary from country to country. For example, Zimbabwe has only about 17.9 percent of people living in slums while in Niger that number is at 81.9 percent.

Country	Year				
	1990	1995	2000	2005	2007
Benin	79.3	76.8	74.3	71.8	70.8
Burkina Faso	78.8	72.4	65.9	59.5	59.5
Cameroon	50.8	49.6	48.4	47.4	46.6
Central African Republic	87.5	89.7	91.9	94.1	95
Ethiopia	95.5	95.5	88.6	81.8	79.1
Ghana	65.5	58.8	52.1	45.4	42.8
Kenya	54.9	54.8	54.8	54.8	54.8
Madagascar	93	88.6	84.1	80.6	78
Malawi	66.4	66.4	66.4	66.4	67.7
Mali	94.2	84.8	75.4	65.9	65.9
Mozambique	75.6	76.9	78.2	79.5	80
Namibia	34.4	34.1	33.9	33.9	33.6
Niger	83.6	83.1	82.6	82.1	81.9
Nigeria	77.3	73.5	69.6	65.8	64.2
Rwanda	96	87.9	79.7	71.6	68.3
Senegal	70.6	59.8	48.9	38.1	38.1
South Africa	46.2	39.7	33.2	28.7	28.7
Tanzania	77.4	73.7	70.1	66.4	65
Uganda	75	75	75	66.7	63.4
Zambia	57	57.1	57.2	57.2	57.3
Zimbabwe	4	3.7	3.3	17.9	17.9

○ 10%

Source: U.N. Habitat. For more information, see <http://urbandata.unhabitat.org/download-data/#/indicators/5>

VIEWPOINT

AFRICAN CITIES: PERSPECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR 2016

Khalifa A. Sall

Mayor of the city of Dakar, Senegal

In the coming decades, migration toward African and Asian cities will account for 90 percent of population movements. Accordingly, African cities are now being forced to anticipate the shocks, constraints, and risks created by urbanization—including sharp investment deficits, scarce resources, and insufficient public service provision—resulting largely from the inadequacy of current urban planning policies.

Confronted by strong demographic pressures, increasing pollution, poor urban infrastructure, and inadequate basic social services, African cities must now rethink their urban development models in order to engage in more dynamic transitions and create new paths toward a better future. By focusing on promoting economic growth and addressing vulnerabilities—through firm commitments from central to municipal governments, strong leadership from local officials, and innovative approaches to mobilizing the necessary resources for local development—these transitions, driven by technological

innovation and green technologies, will allow the creation of attractive, competitive, viable, and sustainable cities.

Faced with insufficient domestic resources, the success of urban transitions will be largely determined by the ability of our cities to seek other sources of financing.

In the Senegalese capital of Dakar, for example, the city is working toward establishing the region's first municipal bond to raise funding for urban infrastructure projects, while also partnering with international donors for technical and financial assistance.

If innovation constitutes a response to the challenges of an increasingly urban world, financial markets—including banking systems, stock markets, and institutional donors—will be crucial components upon which big African metropolises depend in order to mobilize resources. The stakes are considerable for the African continent, as it is in our cities that the struggle for Africa's resurgence will be won or lost.

In the coming decades, migration toward African and Asian cities will account for 90 percent of population movements.

EVENT TO WATCH

THE THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HOUSING AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HABITAT III) OCTOBER 17-20

From October 17 to 20, 2016, the United Nations and other international stakeholders (governments, local authorities, civil society, the private sector, academic institutions, and relevant interest groups) will gather for the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador. The purpose of the conference will be to reassess the global architecture governing urban policies, planning, and development and

decide upon a New Urban Agenda that provides concrete policy recommendations for cities. As one of the first global conferences following the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, it will provide an important opportunity for African stakeholders to discuss paths to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa's cities, especially in light of the continent's rapid urbanization and the challenges this dynamic poses.