

ARTICLE

The Urban Crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Threat to Human Security and Sustainable Development

Mediel Hove*, Emmaculate Tsitsi Ngwerume[†]
and Cyprian Muchemwa^{††}

Urban centres have existed and have been evolving for many centuries across the world. However, the accelerated growth of urbanisation is a relatively recent phenomenon. The enormous size of urban populations and more significantly, the rapidity with which urban areas have been and are growing in many developing countries have severe social, economic and physical repercussions. This paper argues that the accelerated growth of urbanisation has amplified the demand for key services. However, the provision of shelter and basic services such as water and sanitation, education, public health, employment and transport has not kept pace with this increasing demand. Furthermore, accelerated and poorly managed urbanisation has resulted in various types of atmospheric, land and water pollution thereby jeopardising human security. This paper offers the conclusion that the increased environmental, social and economic problems associated with rapid urbanisation pose a threat to sustainable development, human security and, crucially, peace.

Introduction

In almost all African countries, there has been a propensity towards the concentration of growing populations in moderately large cities. Within the developing world cities are the centres of growth and governance, as well as home to an increasing proportion of the national population. Many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have recently experienced accelerated urban expansion. Accord-

ing to a 2004 UN report on *World Urbanisation Prospects*, in 1950 there were only 20 million people, or 10 to 15 per cent of the total population, living in urban areas in Sub-Saharan Africa. At that time it was the least urbanised region in the world and, consistent with colonial era trends, was urbanising at a slow pace. This scenario changed considerably during the post-independence years. Since the early 1970s, Sub-Saharan Africa had the highest urban growth rate in the world, averaging five per cent per annum (Todaro 2000). This transformation can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that several African governments pursued post-independence macro-economic policies that incentivised urbanisation. These policies encouraged the establishment of large scale,

* History Department, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe, medielhove@yahoo.co.uk

[†] Department of Peace and Governance, Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe

^{††} Department of Peace and Governance, Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe

capital-intensive industries situated in large cities. In addition, policies related to agriculture, food subsidies and exchange rates have tended to keep food prices low for urban consumers at the expense of the farmers (World Bank 1989). Largely due to these policies, the level of urbanisation in Sub-Saharan Africa has increased dramatically to nearly 40 per cent today. This translates into a total urban population of about 250 million. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) projects that Sub-Saharan Africa's urban population will double between 2000 and 2030 (UNPF 2007).

There are numerous examples of single-city dominance in the region. For instance, in Mozambique, Maputo accounts for 83 per cent of the country's urban population, while the figures for Dakar, Lome, Kampala and Harare are 65, 60, 52 and 50 per cent respectively (World Bank 2002). Nigeria presents an almost unique exception. Nigeria had well distributed urban centres and in 1995, 14 cities were estimated to have populations of one million or more. Nigeria also has the largest urban sprawls, where cities have engulfed surrounding rural land and adjacent towns leading to continuous belts of settlement. A notable example is Lagos, where the attendant challenges to governance, security, and service delivery are prominent.

Historically, in developed countries urbanisation usually accompanied industrialisation and as a result was closely associated with rapid and sustained economic growth. In contrast, for most countries in contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa, rapid urbanisation is taking place in an economic setting of negligible industrial growth and transformation. Moreover, this rapid urbanisation has occurred during an era when economic growth was more or less stagnant and even declining. It has been estimated that between 1970 and 1995, Africa's urban population grew at about 5 per cent per annum. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita hardly increased or even declined slightly during the same period. Africa stands out as an

archetype of the phenomenon of 'urbanisation without growth' (UN 2003).

The concept of urbanisation has been defined in diverse but interconnected ways. Waugh defines urbanisation as a process by which rural areas are transformed into urban areas and which involves the growth of urban populations through the combined effects of migration and natural increase (Waugh 1990). Otto describes it as a change of employment structure from agriculture and cottage industries to mass production and service industries (Otto 2008). The many definitions have several consistent features. Urbanisation is characterised as a: (i) demographic process, (ii) necessary element of economic and industrial development, (iii) driving force behind social change and (iv) universal phenomenon. Within the field of critical urban research, the urban phenomenon is considered the dynamic result of a complex process of articulation of interactive and often conflicting economic, political, legal and cultural forces. Through this process cities and rural areas in developing countries have been redefined by the changing nature of capitalism and more recently, by the process of economic globalization (Fernandes 1998).

The discussion thus far has focused on the phenomenon of urbanisation in Sub-Saharan Africa. But to understand the problems posed by the current trajectory of this process in this region, an understanding of the desired outcome – namely, sustainable development – is required. The Brundtland Report defines sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' It comprises of two key concepts: (i) the concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and (ii) the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and future needs (Sarre and Smith 1991). Rogers, Jalal and Boyd identified three pillars of sustainable development:

the economic, ecological and socio-cultural or political (Rogers, Jalal and Boyd 2008). Applying this concept, sustainable development requires a careful cost-benefit analysis in order to craft development and environmental policies that will reinforce environmental protection while sustainably improving the welfare of local people.

In discussing sustainable development it is critical to distinguish the concept of human security from the more conventional concept of national security. While national security focuses on the defense of the state from external attack, human security is about shielding individuals and communities from any form of violence or insecurity. The term human security originated in a UNDP (2006) which sought to highlight new concerns about global security and the importance of addressing chronic threats to human life. The report criticised narrow concepts of security that focus mainly on state security while paying little attention to the security concerns of ordinary people in their daily lives. For ordinary people, security is a much more global concept. It means protection from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards. Succinctly, human security is an analytical instrument that shifts attention in security analysis from the state to the individual (UNDP 2006). Human security and national security should be, and often are, mutually reinforcing. However, it is critical to note that a secure state does not automatically make secure people. Defending citizens from foreign attacks may be an essential condition of their human security, but it is not sufficient.

This paper provides a detailed analysis of the nexus or relationship between and among these key issues of urbanisation, sustainable development and human security within the context of Sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, it recommends possible measures and policy options with an aim to mitigate the negative impacts of rapid urbanisation in the region.

Factors affecting urbanisation

In line with broad historical trends elsewhere, rural-to-urban migration in Sub-Saharan African countries constitutes the single most important cause of the rapid growth of the urban population. Migration from rural areas on average accounts for about 60 per cent of the urban population and in exceptional cases, as much as 75 per cent (Todaro 2000). Although rural-to-urban migration has many causes, two stand out. Firstly, poverty in rural areas resulting from low agricultural productivity, aggravated by demographic growth, has been one of the strongest motivations for migration to urban centres. In some instances, prolonged drought or other natural disasters exacerbates rural poverty leading to mass migration from rural to urban areas. Secondly, in most Sub-Saharan African countries, rural areas are relatively under-served in terms of physical, financial, social and economic infrastructure. This neglect of rural areas is reflected in the inadequate allocation of resources for operational expenses and insufficient investment in rural infrastructure, agriculture, schools and hospitals. The negative effects of this neglect are exacerbated by government policies, including state-controlled pricing and marketing of agricultural products, which push farmers and their families into the cities. While urban centres may also be under-served by essential services relative to their inhabitants' needs, the provision of infrastructure and social services is generally much better there than in rural areas. Consequently, the relatively high concentration of social services and potential employment opportunities in urban areas, together with the glamour of city life, are important factors attracting rural people to cities.

The 2009 UN-HABITAT *Global Report on Human Settlements* states that developing regions, including Sub-Saharan Africa, are experiencing the fastest rate of urbanisation attributed to high levels of natural population increase and an increase in rural-to-urban migration. The contribution of natural

	Total Pop. (000s)	Urban Pop. (000s)	% Urban	% Slum	Sum Pop. (000s)
Europe	726,315	534,263	73.6	6.2	33,062
Sub-Saharan Africa	667,022	231,052	34.6	71.9	166,208
LAC	526,657	399,385	75.8	31.9	127,567
East Asia	1,364,438	533,182	64.1	10.3	18,714
West Asia	192,445	124,943	64.9	33.1	41,331
CIS	282,639	181,182	64.1	10.3	18,714
Zimbabwe	12,800	4,600	36.0	3.4	157

Table 1: Levels of urbanisation, urban population and per centage of slums. Source: Global Report on Human Settlements, UN-HABITAT, 2003

population growth, which is high in both rural and urban areas, is second only to that of rural-to-urban migration. The high levels of natural population growth may be explained by the presence of large numbers of first-generation rural-to-urban migrants who bring their rural traditions concerning family size to the city. Also, the availability of relatively better health facilities in the cities results in lower mortality rates and thus contributes to a higher rate of natural population growth. In many countries, particularly those already experiencing relatively high levels of urbanisation, it is likely that in the near future their natural population growth will overtake migration as the leading factor in the growth of urban centres.

Finally, an increasingly important cause of urban population growth in Sub-Saharan Africa is the recurrence and persistence of violent internal conflicts in many countries. For example, the rapid increase of population in Maputo, Luanda, Kinshasa, Monrovia and Freetown resulted from displacement of rural people by conflict. The insecurity resulting from the collapse of law and order in rural areas compels people living in these areas to migrate to the cities in search of improved safety and security. These kinds of movements are sometimes sudden and as a result the migrants are forced to find shelter in extremely precarious makeshift arrangements. Despite the fact that these provisional

settlements are originally intended to be temporary many people ultimately remain in these improvised conditions for extended periods, straining already limited resources.

Urbanisation in Africa is occurring amid increasing levels of urban poverty. One of the spatial manifestations is the proliferation of slums. A slum household is defined as a group of individuals living under the same roof lacking one or more of the following conditions: (i) access to sanitation facilities, (ii) sufficient living area, (iii) structural quality and durability of dwellings and (iv) security of tenure (UN-HABITAT 2008/9). Slum dwellers' houses are often unfit for habitation and lack adequate food, education, health care and basic services (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2011). **Table 1** above helps illustrate the regional and global trends in urbanisation.

Trends in numbers of slum dwellers

Continued urban population expansion resulted in sustained urbanisation. During the previous decade, the proportion of the population living in urban areas rose from 46.6 per cent in 2000 to 50.6 per cent in 2010. During the same period the urban population of developing nations increased from 40.1 per cent to 45.3 per cent. The urban population of developing countries is projected to reach 50.5 per cent in 2020.

Major region	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
Developing countries	46.1	42.8	39.3	35.7	32.7
Africa	60.0	57.2	54.0	51.6	51.3
Northern Africa	34.4	28.3	20.3	13.4	13.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	70.0	67.6	65.0	63.0	61.7
Asia	47.3	43.3	39.1	34.9	30.6
Eastern Asia	43.7	40.6	37.4	33.0	28.2
Southern Asia	57.2	51.6	45.8	40.0	35.0
South-Eastern Asia	49.5	44.8	39.6	34.2	31.0
Western Asia	22.5	21.6	20.6	25.8	24.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	33.7	31.5	29.2	25.5	23.5
Oceania	24.1	24.1	24.1	24.1	24.1

Notes: (1) Trends data are not available for Oceania. (2) A constant figure does not mean there is no change.

Table 1.2: Proportion of urban population living in slums (Estimates and projections (%)).

Source: UN-Habitat GUO data, 2010.

Accessible data from developing regions, confirm that, worldwide efforts to decrease urban inequality and the international community's attempts towards accomplishing MDG and associated targets have given positive results. Regardless of an increase in the total slum population from 767 million in 2000 to 828 million in 2010 (UN-HABITAT GUO data, 2010), the proportion of the urban population living in slums in the developing regions declined from 39.3 per cent to 32.7 per cent during the same period (see **Table 1.2**).

Socio-economic problems facing cities in sub-saharan Africa: poverty, unemployment and underemployment

Africa has increasingly become an urban continent with an average annual growth rate of 3.3 per cent of urban dwellers between 1990 and 2000, the highest in the world (Pieterse 2010). This expansion of Africa's urban population has persisted at a rate that greatly exceeds the rate of creation of

possibilities for gainful employment for job seekers. Employment is particularly hard to find for unskilled rural migrants. Large numbers of school leavers of both rural and urban origin remain unemployed for many years after graduation. Some of these unemployed people find shelter with and depend on relatives. This impairs the cities' ability to meet service delivery needs. Others survive through engagement in the informal economy (Obeng-Odoom 2011). This growing group becomes part of the urban poor.

Urban poverty has many dimensions and causes. Its main characteristics are deprivation and exclusion. In the anonymous and impersonal setting of cities, poverty has dimensions of both material and psychological deprivation. The growing numbers of the urban poor find insecure shelter in overcrowded slums where lack of water and sanitation, electricity, employment, security and social inclusion are the norm (Berger 2006). Other features of urban poverty include hunger, poor health due to nutritional deficiencies and unhealthy living conditions as

well as limited access to school and health services. Survival has become the major concern of the urban poor. Women and children are often the most vulnerable.

One consequence of escalating urban poverty is the growing number of street children in African cities. While some of these children have homes and families but survive by begging or casual work, many have been deserted or orphaned and have no alternative but to live on the street. Their survival is tremendously precarious, and, without schooling, they have little hope for any meaningful future and are extraordinarily vulnerable to abuse. For many, prostitution and crime are the only means to survive. In post-conflict countries street children are one of the most visible legacies of armed conflict. In particular, child soldiers, who are often alienated, traumatized and habituated into violence, present a daunting challenge (Rakisits 2008).

The growth and development of the informal or parallel economy has become an inseparable part of urbanisation in Sub-Saharan countries. Some estimates indicate that in the region, the informal economy and the opportunity it provides for employment will grow at an annual rate of 7 per cent whereas jobs created by the formal economy will likely only increase at a rate of 2 to 3 per cent per year (Todaro 2000). The informal economy employs 60 per cent on average of the urban workforce in Sub-Saharan Africa, but it accounts for less than one quarter of the urban economic growth output. In countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), it may provide urban employment for as much as 80 per cent of the workforce. The International Labor Organization (ILO) reported in June 2005 that 3 to 4 million Zimbabweans earned their living through informal sector employment, supporting another 5 million, while the formal sector employed about 1.3 million people (ZCTU 2005). Productivity in the informal economy is low, and a considerable proportion of the urban workforce employed in the sector represents disguised unemployment. Other distinguishing features of the informal

economy include: ease of entry, reliance on indigenous resources, individual or family ownership of enterprises, small-scale operation, labour intensive and adapted technology, skills acquired outside the formal school system or training programs and operations within unregulated and non-competitive markets. Women are active participants in the informal economy. In some instances, poor women who lack other employment opportunities often resort to operating as commercial sex workers, exposing themselves to danger of disease, abuse and otherwise exacerbating their vulnerability.

The growth and development of the informal or parallel economy has become an inseparable part of urbanisation in Sub-Saharan African countries today. Although considered a valuable 'safety net' for unemployed youth and redundant civil servants as well as a useful cushion softening the impact of economic shocks – the informal economy is characterized by low productivity and incomes. Furthermore, regardless of the large number of participants, it does not generate the levels of income, investment or public revenues needed to address the problems faced by most cities. The realities of the informal economy mean that many municipal authorities are faced with a dilemma regarding informal economic actors. While they recognize that informal sector activities are the only means of livelihood for many of the urban poor, local governments are often also concerned about the contribution of such activities to other urban problems. As a result, their response has been to either largely ignore the informal sector or to resort to periodic campaigns targeting their activities.

Rising crime and human insecurity

Cities all over the world are plagued by both random and organised criminal operations, and Africa is no exception. Ensuring public security and enforcing the rule of law is one of the key urban governance challenges facing African countries. In many instances, crime and violence act as a significant deter-

rent to investment and in some cities large areas have become literally ungovernable. Although provision of security is one of the fundamental responsibilities of the state, this aspect has not always received sufficient political attention. Prior to democratisation, the protection of citizens was not a high priority for the majority of authoritarian governments.

Over the years, the incidences of crime and the degree of violence have increased tremendously in a number of African cities. Crime and violence increasingly accompany deprivation (Kessides 2005). Therefore, the general problems of poverty and social exclusion within urban areas, extreme weaknesses of national police and justice systems and absence of trust between communities and local governments compound the challenge of increasing insecurity. Many cities experience a wide range of criminal activities ranging from the petty to the armed and organized. Theft is the most common crime, but some criminal gangs have graduated to drug trafficking and money laundering. Crime is also facilitated by the anonymous character of the big city, and by such institutional weaknesses as poor pay and inadequate training of police, and by deficiencies in essential infrastructure such as streetlights. Women, the elderly and the weak are easy victims of all kinds of crime. Urban insecurity is, however, not limited to these vulnerable groups. Insecurity is widespread and felt by a high proportion of citizens.

In response to the growing threat of armed robbery and the inability of the police to provide adequate protection, relatively well-to-do individuals and many businesses are engaging private security firms. In some cities, citizens are organising themselves into neighborhood self-protection groups, and in extreme cases, as vigilantes. These vigilante groups and private security firms sometimes replace the law and authority of government agencies both at the municipal and national levels. In addition to the direct effects of insecurity on people, crime and insecurity hamper new investment and expansion of

existing business. In order for African cities to be able to attract new investment and retain existing businesses, it is imperative that crime be combated, and overall safety and public security be restored.

Infrastructure and services

Amidst widespread threat of crime, many of the urban poor are forced to live in situations of extreme human insecurity, sheltered in informal settlements usually on the outskirts of cities, as a result of the shortage of affordable housing. Cognizant of the fact that these settlements are usually illegal, the official response has often been to try to destroy them or force inhabitants to leave. A notable example is Operation *Murambatsvina* (Operation Clean Up) in Zimbabwe in 2005. This operation began in the capital, Harare, but quickly developed into a deliberate nationwide campaign, destroying what the government termed illegal vending sites, structures and other informal business premises and homes, resulting in the displacement of hundreds of people (UN-HABITAT 2005). The operation involved the bulldozing, smashing and burning of structures housing thousands of poor urban dwellers. This example must be understood within the broader context of the urbanisation crisis in Africa. The social, economic and political circumstances in which the operation took place were not specific to Zimbabwe. They share many common aspects with historical and present trends of the rapid and chaotic urbanisation occurring in many African countries and cities (Obeng-Odoom 2011).

To maximise the benefits of urban life, as well as to minimize the adverse effects of living in close proximity to and in slums, adequate and efficient essential services must be assured. Urban planning must determine the appropriate separation of residential from industrial quarters. It must also incorporate infrastructure for transport, communication, and other essential utilities including the supply of electricity, water, and the disposal of sewage and other waste. On the social side, municipalities need to provide facilities

for various levels of education and health services. While some services such as telecommunications and utilities may be more efficiently provided by private enterprises, social services in particular will continue to be the responsibility of public authorities.

In theory, the concentration of urban settlements should make it more economical and feasible to provide all these essential services. In practice however, due to financial limitations and capacity constraints, most African cities are incapable of providing basic services to their citizens. Responsibility for some of these services is either shared or exclusively the preserve of central governments. Problems of inadequacy, inefficiency and deterioration of services are rampant. With regard to transport, communications and other utilities, the gap between demand and supply is widening in many cities. Existing facilities are poorly maintained, and investments in expanded service delivery are constrained by lack of financing. As a result, traffic congestion, inadequate public transport, crumbling roads, intermittent and unreliable electricity, poor telecommunications and insufficient water supply are becoming the norm rather than the exception, even in affluent areas of cities. In some cities, bribery has become commonplace as a means to forestall arbitrary interruption of utility services (Newsday 2012).

In general, lack of adequate infrastructure ranks high among the most basic impediments to economic growth in most Sub-Saharan African countries (United Nations 2004). In an increasingly scientific and knowledge-based world, businesses in Sub-Saharan Africa are disadvantaged by the fact that, with the exception of South Africa, the region has the world's least developed information and communications infrastructure. However, poor infrastructure in cities affects the economic performance of the private sector as well as the living conditions of citizens. The increase of slums means that hundreds of thousands of people live in appalling housing structures and without facilities

like sewerage, electricity, water or paved roads (World Bank 2005). For example, in Harare the influx of people exerted mounting pressure on the Harare Municipality for the supply of amenities such as housing, clinics, transport, health facilities and water and sewage infrastructure. The shortage of housing compelled impoverished urban arrivals to construct illegal shelters leading to increasing shanty dwellings in the city (Colquhoun 1993). Thus, Zimbabwe's capital city has joined the growing list of cities and 'mega cities' of the global south, which are confronted by an ever-growing crisis of deficient provision of basic services (Musemwa 2010). Emblematic of these challenges are other cities such as Lagos, Nairobi, Kumasi, Maputo and Luanda, amongst others. The continuance of rural habits by large numbers of people unaccustomed to living in an urban environment, together with lack of maintenance, has further contributed to the decay of physical infrastructure in cities. This has undermined overall human security and the attainment of sustainable development.

The picture with respect to social services is not much different. The high rate of growth of urban settlements has had many consequences for social services such as education, health and care for the poor and elderly. In many countries, governments have been unable to cope with the rising demand for social services. The basic cause of this inability is often the disparity between the growth of the urban population and the availability of public resources. In some countries, the consequences of this mismatch have been exacerbated by policy choices, which give low priority to the social sectors as compared to other areas of public expenditure, including national security. In most instances, funds are lacking for new investments in schools and medical facilities. Often, sufficient funds are not allocated for the necessary maintenance and running of existing facilities. The overall result is overcrowded classrooms, lack of educational materials, poorly trained and poorly paid teachers, and lack of medicines

and other medical supplies. The quality of service continues to decline in many countries, further exacerbating the breakdown of social capital and overall human security.

Governments in many Sub-Saharan African countries had to face a new and additional burden, the social and economic consequences of the HIV-AIDS epidemic. Countries in Southern and Central Africa in particular are faced with high rates of HIV-AIDS infection (Heinecken 2001). The impact of HIV-AIDS is devastating. Health care systems in many countries are stretched beyond their limits as growing numbers of HIV-AIDS patients occupy nearly all available urban hospital beds (UNAIDS 2011). Furthermore, the HIV-AIDS epidemic increases health expenditures at the individual, municipal and national levels, thereby diverting resources that could have been used for industrial investment. Social services are further affected as many health personnel, teachers and students comprise a significant proportion of those who are infected and dying in increasing numbers. Additionally, many of these professionals enjoy extended leave or give up work to care for the infected family members. The impact of HIV-AIDS goes beyond the social sectors. HIV-AIDS is a major killer, reducing life expectancy, leaving orphans and generally eroding traditional mechanisms of social protection. It is also reducing productivity and incomes, hence affecting overall sustainable economic development capability. Moreover, HIV-AIDS increases the ratio of dependents to workers, resulting in lower savings and further widening the existing gap between savings and investment (UNAIDS 2011).

Prospects and opportunities

There exist many opportunities for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to strengthen service delivery and thereby redress the challenge of human insecurity. By tackling housing challenges, unemployment and water and sanitation issues – while boosting infrastructural development – they can neutralise threats to

their citizens' human security and positively affect urban-rural links.

Developing employment options

High rates of unemployment and limited economic opportunities have created a potentially explosive social problem in many African cities, especially given the particularly high levels of youth unemployment (Eguavoen 2010). As a consequence, generating economic growth and employment have become development imperatives for urban areas throughout the continent. To accomplish this will require significant expansion of the formal private sector, which remains underdeveloped in most African countries. It will also require the encouragement and facilitation of much higher levels of private investment. In the long run, countries cannot compete internationally on the basis of a largely informal economy.

It is therefore incumbent on governments to create an enabling environment for private enterprise and investment. National and local policies can have a significant impact in this regard. It is difficult for enterprises to be competitive if transport costs are high, if corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies result in delays and higher costs and if services are unreliable. For its part, the private sector in Sub-Saharan Africa has to continuously increase its efficiency and productivity if it is to be internationally competitive. Government policies can help the development of the private sector in urban areas not only through targeted interventions but also through general policies designed to remove bottlenecks, streamline procedures and protect property rights. The degree to which private businesses in African cities have to be self-sufficient in terms of providing the power, transport and security services that local and national authorities should reach is often not fully understood.

Given the prominent problem of unemployment in the majority of cities, the encouragement of labor-intensive investments should be an important aspect of

public policy. The responsibility for the enactment of legislation aimed at investment promotion rests with the central government. Various incentives, including tax privileges, could be created to stimulate the adoption of labor-intensive investments (e.g., special tariffs for public utilities), and creating forums for public-private dialogue and consultation. Additionally, the promotion of secondary cities and rural towns through improved spatial planning offers potential for urban employment opportunities.

An important challenge with respect to urbanisation is the management of the progressive transformation of the informal economy into the formal economy, and the encouragement of emerging small and medium enterprises. Public authorities can promote the establishment and growth of formal small and medium scale enterprises by facilitating their access to technology, raw materials, external markets and, especially, commercial banks and other sources of credit. With financial intermediation especially, a range of options are needed. For example, targeted micro-credit schemes have proven effective in assisting segments of the population not served by traditional financial institutions. In most instances, special attention will be required to ensure that women entrepreneurs benefit from policies and are afforded access to services, training and credit.

In many countries, the number, location and variety of informal enterprises are unknown. This greatly hinders the development of effective policy. For example, no policies can be devised to foster linkages between the formal and informal sectors when the locations of the informal enterprises and their main activities are not known. In the same way, there can be no meaningful training to enhance the capacity of informal entrepreneurs without a reasonable idea of where they are or what they do.

The difficulties of successful transition should not be miscalculated, especially when high levels of informality characterise the overall environment. The process of for-

malisation of enterprises entails two distinct but related aspects: attaining and maintaining legal status. These usually involve preliminary registration processes, procedures concerning the location of the enterprises, health and safety standards, registrations concerning taxes and rules related to labour. The most critical is the registration of the enterprise itself. High registration fees and cumbersome processes deter many informal entrepreneurs from seeking formal status. The registration of informal enterprises with appropriate government authorities needs to be encouraged through the lowering of registration fees and the decentralisation of registration offices so that no entrepreneur will go beyond his or her local authority to register.

The market for products of many informal enterprises is very restricted. This retards innovation and productivity. Strategies to enlarge the market may include fostering of linkages and sub-contracting between informal and formal enterprises. Doing so could also help to induce some informal enterprises to become formal. Extending additional advantages, such as extension of credit and provision of technical and professional advice to informal enterprises by formal enterprises, may motivate this transition. In addition to enhancing productivity and innovation, increasing formalisation of activities can also lead informal enterprises to pay taxes and other levies, which would result in increased revenues and better public service at the city level.

Improving urban facilities

In principle, fundamental and essential social services should be available to all. In some cases a lack of jobs or income partly explains the exclusion of many poor urban dwellers from urban facilities like clinics, schools and public housing. However, the public provision of social services, even to those who can afford them, is seriously hampered by inadequate physical facilities, poor maintenance and inefficient institutional arrangements. Transport, energy, communications and water supply are among

the other municipal services that are often inadequately provided. Furthermore, dissatisfied customers of utilities are reluctant to pay user charges, and may feel justified in evading municipal levies and taxes. The private sector is unlikely to invest or expand its operations under such conditions. This erodes the tax base, which in turn means that governments both at the central and local levels find themselves with insufficient funds to maintain or upgrade existing facilities (World Bank 2011). As revenues are not likely to increase in the short term, authorities will have to focus on improving policies, management and the effective use of existing resources. Adequate attention and resources should be devoted to the maintenance of existing facilities, and not just to the creation of new infrastructure.

One crucial issue is the provision of public services in slums and illegal housing areas. In many cases, even when such settlements are permitted by the government, municipal authorities fail to provide services for these areas. In some cases, however, policy changes have led to radical improvements. In these examples, the provision of basic services within the slum areas has led to an overall upgrading of slums, and even to collection of rent. Some local authorities registered considerable success in providing affordable housing through 'site and service' arrangements, which allow residents to upgrade when they can afford to do so.

In the long term, the adequacy of services and infrastructure will likely be significant factors in the prosperity, as well as livability of cities. Municipal authorities usually indicate that they lack the resources to upgrade infrastructure. Oftentimes, poor planning and lack of innovation confound these challenges. A lack of long-term, city-wide planning often results in piecemeal and ad hoc interventions as well as substantial disparities in terms of service provision within cities. Conversely, a long-term development strategy can help municipal authorities to provide adequate service coverage in a cost-effective manner, taking advantage of econo-

mies of scale and existing networks. It can also help to balance environmental concerns with the needs of urban populations. Much of the environmental degradation evident in major cities results from lack of planning or adherence to regulatory standards.

To help reduce urban poverty, it is important that consideration be given to improving access to basic services within entire cities. Current managerial arrangements in many urban areas preclude this, leading to competition among administrative structures for existing resources, often to the detriment of poor areas. Dialogue between municipal authorities and communities, along with monitoring and feedback on delivery, has helped to improve provision of infrastructure and service in some cities by better defining needs, encouraging citizen participation, and reducing corruption (Babcock 2008). Throughout the world, public-private partnerships have become increasingly important vehicles for the provision of urban infrastructure. Provided they are well designed and managed, such ventures have generally been successful. Additionally, in many cities the responsibility for certain functions such as waste collection have been contracted out to private operators, with great success at improving service provision and stimulating private enterprise.

Strengthening Rural-Urban linkages

Maximising the positive aspects of urbanisation and minimising the negative requires strategic planning and management at the municipal level, supported by effective systems for the collection of data and information. However, it also depends on the coherence of national policies and promotion of the synergies between urban and rural areas within a broad development framework. This may include strategies to support the growth of small towns and secondary cities, complementing the trend toward decentralisation. While this will not necessarily reduce the overall rate of urbanisation, it will change the spatial distribution of urban populations, limiting the pressure on capital cities

and major urban centres, and perhaps also reducing levels of urban poverty. Turok and Parnell argue that the purpose of an urban policy is not to marginalize rural areas but rather to ensure that national strategy takes account of major societal shifts that make urban and rural areas more interdependent. As such, urban policy should complement rather than contradict rural development initiatives (Turok and Parnell 2009).

Secondary cities have great potential to strengthen rural-urban linkages, retain young talent in their general areas of origin, and more importantly, to stem migration from rural areas to cities. Provincial or secondary cities in most cases are ideally located to stimulate and enhance agricultural productivity. They can serve as markets, storage and processing centres, and supply points for improved agricultural technologies and essential farm inputs, as well as consumer goods. Due to their proximity, they provide viable opportunities for off-farm and off-season employment. Additionally, farm households and other rural people may easily access other essential services, including schools and health centres, transport and communication links, as well as banking and credit institutions, all of which can be and usually are located in secondary cities. Governments should encourage and support the growth and viability of these cities as a means to strengthen rural-urban linkages as well as enhance service provision.

While every country is different, the experience from the recent past in many Sub-Saharan African countries suggests that the economic development of rural areas is largely dependent on both the diversity of rural-urban linkages and the extent to which they are exploited. Reliable and varied flows of people, trade and resources have also proven beneficial. In contrast, those regions without adequate infrastructure networks and relations with urban centres continue to be isolated and therefore marginalised in the modern, national economy. The foundation for strengthened rural-urban linkages exists in most African countries. At

the household level, there is often considerable movement of family members between rural and urban areas. Many urban dwellers maintain houses: land and livestock in rural areas, and remittances from family members in urban areas often provide an important safety net for rural households. Policies that build on such linkages could help to improve the economic situation in rural areas, as well as stimulate the development of small and medium enterprises in rural towns and smaller cities.

The improvement of transport and communications networks, together with the development of small towns and secondary cities to provide accessible markets for agricultural produce could serve to strengthen rural economies and help to boost rural-urban linkages. At the same time, policies to improve agricultural productivity and stimulate non-farm employment are central to reducing rural poverty. If rural-urban migration is to be stemmed and the wellbeing of rural populations improved, a more diversified employment structure is needed. Policies that address land use and tenure, as well as those that improve access to markets, credit and agricultural inputs, would help to reduce this well-established flow of migration.

Conclusion

Redressing the political, social and economic problems posed by speedy urbanisation is one of the most pressing governance challenges confronting African governments today. The prevalence of urban poverty and deprivation, sharply contrasted with relative wealth, have created a potentially volatile situation, which if left unattended could result in insecurity and even lead to political upheaval. People migrate to urban centres hoping to secure a better future for themselves and their families. Governments have an obligation to create policies that permit them to accomplish this goal. Admittedly, the challenges facing urban areas are daunting. However, recent democratisation and improved communication capabilities have presented most African governments with a

fresh opportunity to tackle these challenges in partnership with civil society.

In addition, urbanisation presents economic and political opportunities for national development. In the struggle to improve service provision, citizens employ participatory strategies as they establish community structures or elected bodies. This process also fosters citizen engagement in national politics more generally, advancing popular political awareness and the institutionalisation of democratic culture. With a suitable political milieu, the economic potential of urbanisation can provide a foundation for national growth and prosperity towards the creation of vibrant and affluent cities in Africa, and beyond. African countries can assimilate tactics from other regions in their quest to transform the urbanisation they are experiencing from an unbridled phenomenon to the centrepiece in development initiatives today. Accordingly, if pragmatic efforts are made to effectively manage urbanisation, African cities will be both sustainable and able to provide human security to their citizens.

References

- Babcock, C** et al 2008 The Right to Participate: Participatory Budgeting and Revenue Generation in Uganda. In: *African regional seminar on participatory budget*, Durban, South Africa on 10–14 March 2008.
- Berger, T** 2006 *Slums and insecure tenure in urban Sub Saharan Africa-A conceptual review of African best practices*. Thesis (MA), Institute of Housing and Urban research, Uppsala University.
- Colquhoun, S** 1993 Present problems facing the Harare City Council, in Zinyama, L M, Tevera D S and Cumming S D (eds.) *Harare: The growth and problems of the city*, Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications.
- Eguavoen, I** 2010 Lawbreakers and livelihoods makers: Youth specific poverty and ambiguous livelihood strategies in Africa. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies: An International Interdisciplinary Journal for Research, Policy and Care*, 5(3): 268–273. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17450128.2010.507803>.
- Fernandes, E** (ed.) 1998 *Environmental Strategies for Sustainable Development / in Urban Areas: Lessons from Africa and Latin America*. Brookfield, Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Heinecken, L** 2001 Living in Terror. *African Security Review*, 10(4): 6–17.
- Kessides, C** 2005 'The Urban Transition in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for Economic Growth in Africa Region', in Lawrence, R J 1997 *Better Understanding Our Cities; The role Urban Indicators*, Paris, OECD.
- Lawrence, R J** 1997 *Better Understanding Our Cities: The Role of Urban Indicators*. Paris, OECD.
- Musemwa, M** 2010 From 'Sunshine City' to a Landscape of Disaster: The Politics of Water, Sanitation and Diseases in Harare, Zimbabwe, 1980–2009. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 26(2): 165–206. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0169796X1002600202>
- Newsday** 7 May 2012.
- Obeng-Odoom, F** 2011 Informal sector in Ghana under siege. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 27(3–4): 355–392. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0169796X1102700406>.
- Otto G** 2008 "Urbanisation in Nigeria: Implications for Socio-Economic Development" in *Journal of Research in National Development* Volume 6 No 2, December.
- Pieterse, E** 2010 Filling the void: Towards an Agenda for Action on African Urbanisation. In: African Centre for Cities *Urbanisation Imperatives for Africa: Transcending Policy Inertia*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town. pp. 7–45.
- Rakisits, C** 2008 Child Soldiers in East of Democratic of Congo. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 27(4): 108–122. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdn054>.
- Rogers, P, Jalal, K F and Boyd, J A** 2008 *An Introduction to Sustainable Development*, London: Eathscan.

- Sarre, P, Smith, P and Morris, E** 1991 *One World For One Earth, Saving the Environment*, London, Earthscan.
- Todaro, M** 2000 *Economic Development*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Turok, I and Parnell, S** 2009 Reshaping Cities, Rebuilding Nations: The Role of National Urban Policies. *Urban Forum*, 20: 157–174. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12132-009-9060-2>.
- UNAIDS** 2011 *World Report*. Geneva, Switzerland: UNAIDS.
- UN-HABITAT** 2003 *Global Report on Human Settlement*. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-HABITAT.
- UN-HABITAT** 2005 *Report on Zimbabwe - Operation Murambatsvina*. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-HABITAT.
- UN-HABITAT** 2008 *State of the World's Cities Report*. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-HABITAT.
- UN-Habitat GUO data**, 2010.
- United Nations** 2004 *World Urbanisation Prospects: The 2003 Revision*. New York, NY: United Nations.
- United Nations Development Programme** 2006 *The Human Security Framework and National Human Development Reports: A Review of Experiences and Current Debates*. New York City, NY: UNDP.
- United Nations Population Fund** 2007, *State of World Population 2007: Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth*, accessed online at www.unfpa.org, on 3 January, 2013.
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)** 2011 *Population Distribution, Urbanisation, Internal Migration and Development: An International Perspective*. New York City, NY.
- Waugh D** 1990, *Geography: Integrated Approach*, UK, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, pp. 350–351.
- World Bank** 1989 *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, Washington DC: World Bank.
- World Bank** 2002 *World Development Report 2002: Building Institutions for Markets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- World Bank** 2005 *Working Paper Series No. 97: The Urban Transition in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for Economic Growth in Africa Region*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- World Bank** 2011 *Report on Zimbabwe*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- ZCTU** 2005 *Annual Report*, Harare, ZCTU.

How to cite this article: Hove, M 2013 The Urban Crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Threat to Human Security and Sustainable Development. *Stability*, 2(1): 7, pp. 1-14, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.ap>

Published: 11 March 2013

Copyright: © 2013 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License (CC-BY 3.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>.

 *Stability* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press

OPEN ACCESS 