

Session 6: Interlinkages of demographic trends and urbanisation: challenges and opportunities

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Cities have been recognised for the key role they have played in the economic development of societies. In this regard Simmel (1903/2012) has placed them at the centre of the rise of modernity, and charted how their growth (urbanisation) has been linked to the rise of both capitalism and industrialisation in the occident. This has led sociologists such as Wirth (1938/2012) to study how key characteristics – size, density and heterogeneity has shaped urbanism as a way of living, bringing about large-scale changes in social relations. As large agglomerations, cities have been seen as nodes of resource consumption, sites of innovation and key drivers of change within societies. Castells (2002) and Sassen (2012) amongst others have analysed the key roles that cities play within the context of globalisation.

Therefore process of urbanisation is seen as a potential driver of economic development, increasing welfare and enabling structural transformation. By providing supportive infrastructure, cities can serve as engines of economic growth. Agglomeration ensures a market, spurs creativity and encourages entrepreneurial activity. With infrastructural and institutional efficiency, jobs are created, livelihoods improved and social inclusion achieved. Within the context of neoliberalism, urban competitiveness becomes a key matter. However, much of this work has focussed on the global north, and this raises some questions with regard to where it leaves cities in Africa (Friedman, 2012).

It should be noted as a caveat that Africa is the second largest continent, currently constituted by 54 states, many multi-ethnic, revealing an immense degree of cultural and religious diversity. A process of highlighting broad trends in the continent, therefore, only partially tells the story. However, much of Africa, barring Ethiopia, experienced a history of colonial subjugation, having served as a site for the extraction of resources. In this regard new cities were largely established for administrative purposes, often being segregated, particularly in Eastern and Southern Africa. The impact of colonisation on these cities, and the modernist planning introduced during this period, resulted in

selective investments, a legacy which cannot be ignored when considering the state of contemporary cities infrastructure in Africa (Coquery-Vidrovich, 2005).

With regard to urbanisation, Africa has lagged other continents. In 1950 when approximately 13% of the continent's population resided in cities, only two cities had populations of over one million inhabitants. Currently one city, Al-Qahirah, ranks amongst the ten largest cities world-wide – with two other cities Lagos and Kinshasa joining it as mega-cities housing more than 10 million inhabitants. By 2030, Africa will have at least six megacities, of which two will rank in the top ten in terms of population size (UN-DESA, 2018; OECD/UN ECA/AfDB, 2022). Regionally Southern and Northern Africa have had higher levels of urbanisation, with Eastern Africa reflecting the lowest level of urbanisation. In spite of recent rapid urbanisation, only a few cities in Africa feature in the rankings of key nodes in the global economy, reflecting the continent's marginal position in this regard (Cobbinah, et al. 2015).

In the past three decades the number of cities in Africa has doubled, hence urbanisation is one of the profound changes' societies on the continent face. It should be noted that many of these cities are small or medium in size, with their growth receiving as much less attention than the large or mega-cities. However, the emergence of the small and medium-sized cities do point to fundamental changes in settlement patterns and livelihoods across the continent. Therefore, within a relatively short period, the least urbanised continent in terms of human settlement, Africa, has been characterised by the highest rate of urbanisation world-wide (UN-DESA, 2018; OECD/UN ECA/AfDB, 2022; Fritz, 20182).

The scale of these rapid changes, can be illustrated by Lagos which grew from 1.4 million residents to approximately 21 million in 2019, and is projected to have 88 million by 2100. The continent's urban population is projected to triple in four decades from 395 million in 2010 to 1.339 billion by 2050, surpassing that of Europe, South and North America (UN-DESA, 2018; OECD/UN ECA/AfDB, 2022).

This rapid urban transition and urban growth is not merely the result of rural-urban migration which is spurred on by the expected environmental changes occurring globally, but also a consequence of the youthful age structure of the continent's population – with a median age of 18.8 years and a fertility rate of 4.21 in 2022. It should be noted that there are large variations in the fertility rate, as well as rate of urbanisation across countries within Africa. Nevertheless, these overarching rates do

suggest that cities within Africa have the youngest populations globally, and hence the greatest potential for population growth, thereby shaping the economic, social and political landscape.

The youthfulness of the population, and anticipated growth, poses both opportunity and challenge. On the one side there is the promise of a demographic dividend. This will be realised if the growing economically active population attain the necessary skill-set to obtain gainful employment, increasing their economic contribution, and lowering rates of dependency. To achieve such a harnessing of the demographic trend, investment in services such as education and training is required. On the other side the track record of the past, and chronic underinvestment in services, do highlight the risk that the demographic opportunity may be missed, resulting in further strain on services, impoverishment and even social instability. This risk of failing to bring about an economic transition was highlighted by the ignition of protest against authorities in 2010 and 2011 across the regions of North Africa and the middle-East, dubbed the Arab Spring. It unleashed pent-up grievances, as a result of the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi an informal trader in Tunisia due to official harassment and confiscation of goods he received. This incident resulted from an institutional hostility to informality in trading, considered unlawful in terms of local regulations on licensing, the latter often providing barriers to trade due to its cost. Besides harassment by authorities, the cost of living, and poor service delivery can also spark protest. The Arab Spring, furthermore demonstrated the role that social media can play in communicating and mobilising, shaping relationships. The use of ICT in these novel ways, is not surprising given the rapid penetration of this technology across Africa which is currently above 80%, opening up a number of alternative economic possibilities as well (Beyer, 2018).

The anticipated improvement in access to basic services in cities and hence a corresponding opportunity for better livelihoods has been a drawcard in migration from rural to urban areas, whilst poor infrastructure, precarious subsistence farming, limited livelihood options and regional conflicts all contribute as push factors. Development trajectories remain skewed towards the urban (Cobbinah, et al. 2015). The question remains whether cities in Africa can meet these expectations, in the context where high population growth adds an additional strain on infrastructure. Given legacies of the past African cities are characterised by informality, reflecting an under-investment in services delivered. Once again, the extent of informality varies significantly between countries across the continent, whilst remaining on aggregate higher than elsewhere in the world. Informality therefore is a key element of social reproduction and economic life on the African continent. It raises questions on the extent to which cities in Africa can foster opportunities for residents and ensure social and economic

welfare, as well as whether unplanned urbanisation may erode socio-economic benefits, given an uncoupling of urban growth from a corresponding industrialisation as has occurred elsewhere (Adegun, 2020; Fritz, 2018). In this regard it is not surprising that one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, 11, sets out to: Make cities and human settlement inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Meeting these objectives would create the ideal environment for families to flourish.

The Institute for Strategic Studies reports that in 2019 central Africa had the highest rate of extreme poverty (54.8%) on the continent, followed by Southern Africa (45.1%), Western and Eastern Africa (respectively at 36.8% and 33.8%), and Northern Africa, reaching the target of extreme poverty dropping below 3%. Correspondingly, approximately 56% of the inhabitants of cities in sub-Saharan Africa live in informal settlements. In contrast the figure for north Africa is 12% (Aiken & McLachlan, 2022).

Given the pervasiveness of informality, slowing of economic growth and economic stagnation world-wide, the limited prospect of attaining adequate formal employment has necessitated inhabitants of informal settlements to rely on engaging in unregulated economic activities yielding low-incomes. The precarity of these survivalist strategies undermines the prospect of escaping poverty and deprivation. Furthermore, given the lack of affordable housing stock the most vulnerable congregate in self-built informal underserviced settlements, with poor sanitation and a lack of potable water, often increasing the risk of poverty, vulnerability and insecurity, often due to the lack of officially-sanctioned tenure. One such an example is the overcrowded Ng'ome in Lusaka, a densely populated shanty compound with over 65 000 inhabitants, another is Kibera, Nairobi, which is estimated to have up to a million inhabitants, way above formal figures. This growth of informal settlements, due to the slow pace of in-situ upgrading and public housing delivery has resulted in them becoming permanent, albeit precarious settlements in these cities. A majority of inhabitants in both cities live in unauthorised informal settlements (Meyers 2011).

Commenting on South African urbanism, Simone (2007) has used the metaphor of suspension between the modern and refugee camp. On the one hand these polar opposites speak to the tension in planning between a quest to establish world class cities, by investing in premium infrastructure to attract investment, showcasing the city by connecting it to regional and global economies and on the other hand the view of the informal settlements and activities as a nuisance requiring regulation and

control. Once again there is the possibility that the elite would direct investment to the former resulting in skewed capital investment, to the detriment of investment in public services for informal areas. Another drawback is the possibility of rent-seeking behaviour, siphoning off public funds. The speculative public and privatised investment in premium infrastructure to increase the global competitiveness and attractiveness of the city is exclusionary (Fritz, 2018; Simone, 2010a).

The metaphor of a refugee camp, further speaks to the impact a deficit in capital has on the poor, youth, and women. When aspirations cannot be met due to a lack of education and skills they are condemned to the margins of urban life. In fact, in the current dire economic conditions even graduates struggle to access jobs in the formal sector. Hence, they find themselves in limbo, in what Simone (2007) refers to the ever-present. This results in a suspended or delayed social adulthood, necessitating relations outside of familial frameworks to ensure livelihoods. Such circumstances also apply to those displaced by internal-conflict.

Ethnographies on urbanism however reveal the complex ways in which the informal and formal are related to each other (Simone, 2010b). In spite of all the deprivation in informal settlements, weak administrative capacity in cities, as well as limited finances and political constraints that retard the potential of cities to accelerate social development, urban areas on balance do offer better economic outcomes and higher standards of living than rural areas, given better educational and health care access. In instances where educational gains have been achieved, for girls, the fertility rate drops as well.

Whilst many African countries have signed on to the African Urban Agenda and Agenda 63, the AU's initiative to transform the continent into a key global player in future, policies to alleviate poverty and economic development remains selective and do not provide equal opportunities for all. A key issue remaining is how to achieve a liveable city for all within it (UN-HABITAT, 2009). This speaks to the right to the city, which not only addresses access to services of collective consumption – affordable housing, potable water, sanitation, waste management, power, education, health and public transport, but also requires inclusion in governance through participation in decision-making fora, ensuring that all needs are met and the allocation of resources are prioritise to ensure greater access and equity (Bekker & Fouchard, 2013).

Given this broad overview: What is the impact of these trends on families? Which policies and practices, potentially would strengthen Families? Ensuring adequate accessible public services for collective consumption, provides a sound foundation for families to build on. In this regard ensuring secure tenure and affordable serviced housing can play a central role in establishing communities and engendering belonging. The better building programme in the decaying inner-city of Johannesburg is an example of an innovative programme drawing on public-private partnerships in providing social housing and addressing the rent-gap. Buildings abandoned by landlords have been auctioned off to cover arrears in rates, and subsidies and rebates in rates have enabled private entrepreneurs to repurpose them and provide rental stock at affordable market-rates, closer to job opportunities in the centre. The establishment of pre-school educare facilities by NGOs, enable women to enter the labour market, and the rehabilitation of public parks and establishment of community policing associations have made some inner-city areas more liveable and secure for families. A number of overlapping initiatives like these create a habitus in which families feel supported, included and belong to the city. By addressing the issues of service delivery, ensuring good participatory governance, inclusive communities can be built. Furthermore expanding the formal labour market, has the potential of growing the working and middle classes with greater consumption and economic growth as a result (Dietz, 2018; Mosselson, 2017).

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