

## CONCEPT NOTE

### URBAN GOVERNANCE AND TURNING AFRICAN CITIES AROUND

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## About PASGR

The Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR) is a pan-African organization established in 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya<sup>1</sup> with a vision to promote a vibrant African social science community that addresses governance and public policy issues in Africa. PASGR pursues its vision through three core programmes: Higher Education, Professional Development and Training and Research. In higher education programme, PASGR works with African universities to strengthen the provision of graduate-level teaching and practice of social science research. For public policy, PASGR currently works with 12 universities to deliver a collaborative *Master of Research and Public Policy* in 7 countries<sup>2</sup>. Through the professional development and training programme, PASGR provides a range of short-term training for different audiences in the African research, academic and policy communities. In research, PASGR works with African social scientists to produce high quality research that contributes to public policy. PASGR supports research through financing, technical and policy outreach and communications. PASGR's Board of Directors through an independent advisory research committee periodically selects research themes that have broad relevance to African development. The themes are then examined through a governance lens, in order to generate ideas that improve governance institutions and ultimately, transform the living conditions of people in the countries where the studies are conducted. One such theme for the period 2015-2018 is 'urban governance and turning African Cities Around'.

## Introduction: Urban Governance and Turning African Cities Around

This theme is chosen against the background of rapid urbanisation that is currently taking place on the continent and an emerging evidence that some African metropolitan cities are turning around from their past failures to provide adequate infrastructure and services, regulate the urban space, address social justice and rights of citizens, create or uphold inclusive cities and economies, collect adequate local revenue, improve service networks, provide jobs for the urban poor, and improve security. Lagos, the most populous city in Nigeria and Africa is frequently cited<sup>3</sup> as one of the cities that has significantly improved its governance performance. The city is said to have improved traffic congestions, solid waste collection, public transport, business environment, security and revenue collection. Generally Lagos is said to have been 'turned around'.

Increasingly, there are discussions of other cities on the continent that are showing evidence of improved urban governance and turned around. The narratives of recent positive improvements in urban governance, service delivery, rights and justice in Africa's complex and diverse cities call for deeper contextual and empirical analyses of the determinants of the so-called improvements, their dynamics, the factors such as the mix between institutional depth, leadership, devolution and other factors that have given rise to 'turned around'. There is indeed, the need for empirically grounded case/comparative studies on African cities to provide relevant lessons on the conditions for success and/or failure, distillation of the potential translate lessons into policies and action, and training and capacity building of various stakeholders and actors in the urban context.

This concept note provides the background information and rationale for the research theme, identifies some potential governance research projects that can emanate from the theme and the approach PASGR intends to take in facilitating empirical studies.

## Background and Rationale for the Study

The urban governance landscape in Africa is undergoing rapid demographic, social, economic, technological, and political changes. First, Africa is currently the fastest urbanizing continent in the world

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<sup>1</sup> PASGR is also incorporated in the State of Delaware, USA.

<sup>2</sup> Botswana, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Sierra Leone and Tanzania

<sup>3</sup> Kaplan, S. (2014a) 'What makes Lagos a modern city' *The New York Times* 7/1/2014; Kaplan, S. (2014b) Can Cities Save the Future? *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* Vol. XX, issue II: (203-217)

with an annual growth rate of 3.3% compared to global average of 2.5%<sup>4</sup>. Many Africans now live in urban areas than at any other period in history. It is estimated that by 2030 more than 50% of Africans will live in cities and by 2050, urbanization will rise to 61%. Cities such as Kinshasa, Lagos, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam will double their 2005 population by 2020. Generally, urbanization is a major source of economic growth and transformation of societies. Cities contribute significantly to a country's GDP, provide markets, and serve as centres of agglomeration of firms and structural change, and strong political and social movement. In the past 50 years, Africa's centres of economic activity have shifted from agrarian countryside to urban areas. Even at 40% urbanization, it is estimated that between 55-60% of the continent's GDP emanates from cities. Nairobi with only 5% of Kenya's population contributes more than 20% of the country's GDP<sup>5</sup>. This suggests that the future of economic and social transformation in Africa is connected to the overall success of major cities, so modes of urban governance could be the catalyst for that transformation. But how are Africa's major cities being positioned to benefit from urbanization? What are the dominant modes of governance in the cities? How does a particular mode of urban governance provide opportunity for inclusiveness in terms of the economic participation of the poor and other marginalized groups, meaningful access to services and tenure, and protection of rights and advancement of citizenship?

Second, modes of governance and management of present day Africa's metropolitan centres may have been influenced by their geographical location, association or integration with the outside world, historical legacies, and local political histories. Historically, Abidjan, Kinshasa and Nairobi were colonial creations while Lagos, Douala and Kampala existed before colonization<sup>6</sup>. In some countries, the urban structure was built for colonial administrative control and extraction of economic surplus and not for productive purposes. So as cities expanded and many migrants transferred their economic and social expectations to the cities, they have found the urban structure inflexible (or incompatible) to absorb their expectations. How is the colonial creation of cities, allocation of responsibilities and engagement with the outside world influence a city's turnaround efforts? How has the history of local politics, leadership, social movements, civil society groups and political party competition shaped improvements in present urban governance in African cities? Are these obstacles or facilitators or both? What are the tensions and associations between these different forces?

Third, despite the opportunities that cities provide, many African countries have had major challenges managing urban growth in the past<sup>7</sup>. Overcrowding, inadequate open spaces and slums, and increasing crime and violence characterized urban growth. As a result, the current growth of cities raises a lot of concerns to policy actors, especially metropolitan governments on how to respond with new and appropriate governance mechanisms. Given that conventional approaches to managing urban challenges have foundered, some city governments are reinventing themselves through innovative approaches in planning for development; governance and administration of cities; service delivery arrangements; financing development; and enforcement of regulations. But in which African cities are these innovative governance and urban management approaches occurring? How are they being implemented? And what are their achievements? Are these innovations rooted in institutional contexts that will ensure their viability and sustainability?

Fourth, many of the fast growing cities in SSA (Lagos, Nairobi, Abidjan, Luanda, Kano, and Kinshasa) are also located in countries that are either emerging from conflicts or are still fragile polities. Given the challenges that fragile countries face -weak institutional capacity and limited infrastructure - supporting urban governments to turn their major cities around can be more successful than perhaps focusing on a central government to do the same. Is it possible that a functioning city in a fragile state can transform a

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<sup>4</sup> UN-Habitat (2010) The state of African Cities Report: Governance, Inequality and Urban Land Markets. Nairobi: UN-Habitat

<sup>5</sup> AfDB (undated) Transforming Africa's cities and towns into engines of economic growth and social development.

<http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Policy-Documents/Urban-Development%20Strategy-Rev%201.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> UN-Habitat (2002) Principles and realities of urban governance in Africa. Nairobi: UN-HABITAT

<sup>7</sup> Stren, R.E & White, R. (1989) *African cities in crisis: managing rapid urban growth* Boulder: West view Press

dysfunctional state by extending the gains of successful management up to the national level? If a research is able to establish this, then we could be talking about a bubbling up rather than a trickle down approach. To verify this empirically, it is important for research to seek the experience of actors that have successfully transformed large cities in fragile states. While conceding that there are differences between managing a city and a state, a thriving city has potential positive externalities for a nation. In countries where the state may be limited in geographical reach, a system of governance that focuses on transforming cities could provide the foundation for renewal of state building, rapid growth and stability. This is the argument behind the literature on development of pockets of state effectiveness or what Levy calls 'working with the grain'.<sup>8</sup>

Fifth, in almost every country in Africa there is currently a policy of decentralization that seeks to streamline the state-local level relationship and to bring services and government closer to where people live. Decentralization policies have compelled central governments to transfer some authority, responsibilities and resources to sub-national governments. Through these transfers, the expectations are that incentives for good performance and accountability between government and citizens will be enhanced. Nevertheless, decentralization policies in Africa have transferred significant service responsibilities to sub-national governments without the necessary fiscal competence. To turn their fortunes around, some city governments are developing various means of mobilizing local revenue such as property taxes, fees on land, businesses, and services that they have the fiscal authority to collect. Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, South Africa, and Cote' D'Ivoire have all devolved some central government powers to local/state governments. The question is: to what extent have Nairobi, Kinshasa, Accra, Johannesburg, and Abidjan metropolitan governments used the opportunity that decentralization brings to mobilize internally generated revenue? In other words, how has the degree of decentralization in a country played a critical role in facilitating/inhibiting a city's fiscal 'turned around'?

Sixth, democratic decentralization or devolution has changed accountability relationship between citizens and elected politicians as well as between central and sub-national governments. In many countries, opposition political parties have taken control of urban agglomerations or capital cities from national ruling political parties in recent elections. African cities such as Cape Town, Cotonou, Kampala, Dakar, Lusaka, Harare, and Gaborone have experienced a vertically divided authority.<sup>9</sup> As a result central/federal governments have no incentives to support sub-national governments in the management of cities. In fact central governments may design strategies to derail sub-national efforts to turn around. Given cities' economic relevance and concentration of voters, they have become centres of political contestation. Analysis of political settlements between national and sub-national governments would be insightful and provide new knowledge on the complexities of turning cities around under conditions of vertically divided authority. In addition, given that a sizeable proportion of Africa's growing middle class resides in cities and have tendency to demand better governance, accountability and service provision from governments than their rural counterparts, to what extent does current urbanization pose a political threat to ruling political parties at the national level if vertically divided authority expands to other urbanizing towns?

Seven, as cities grow in sizes and population, so do varieties of actors multiply and demand space in urban governance. In the absence of government services, non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations and small enterprises have developed new mechanisms to provide services resulting in much informality in terms of service provision, economy and settlements in cities<sup>10</sup>. Urban governments while they may have limited capacities to develop service policies and enforce their implementation, sometimes act in ways that disable innovative or informal mechanisms. However, contemporary 'good-fit'

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<sup>8</sup> Levy, B. (2014). *Working with the grain: integrating governance and growth in development strategies*. Oxford Uni. Press

<sup>9</sup> Resnick, D. (2014) 'Urban Governance and Service Delivery in African Cities: The Role of Politics and Policies' *Development Policy Review*, 32(S1):s3-s17

<sup>10</sup> Pieterse, E. (2012) Institutional dimensions of the urban development crisis in Africa. A presentation at ACC & UNU-WIDER Seminar on 05/6/2012, Cape Town; Parnell, S. & Pieterse, E. (2014) *Africa's Urban Revolution*. Zed Publishers

approach to managing large cities where the government is limited in scope and reach would suggest a complex relationship/interaction among varieties of actors and institutions to steer urban service, economy and space. In the context of multiple actors, the city government becomes only one of the actors in urban governance but it is expected to provide the enabling environment for other actors to participate effectively in city governance. Turning cities around would imply city governments negotiating with multiple stakeholders. How does a metropolitan government combine, relate and balance different forms of contestations, negotiations and partnerships with multiple actors to turn a city around? What are the tradeoffs in the narratives and actions of improved governance? Are these activities leading to greater exclusion and inequalities? How are cities improving governance and addressing inequalities and inequities simultaneously? Are they mutually exclusive?

Eight, solid waste and environmental management is one of the most intractable challenges affecting many African cities. Together with informal and unregulated urban settlements, sanitation, traffic and industrial emissions, and absence of green space are major contributors to environmental degradation in cities. These challenges are likely to get worse with conventional urban governance approach and rapid urbanization. Given that cities are the major producers of greenhouse gases, urbanisation that is taking place will exacerbate environmental degradation. Urban governments can play important roles in promoting green economy through land-use planning, integrated design strategies, technologies, urban agriculture and the construction of buildings, as well as urban utilities of water and waste systems. The changes that are taking place in terms of municipal financial incentives for enterprises and disincentives such as environmental taxes can inform current debate about climate changes. What motivates a city to incorporate greenery in their turn around strategies? How are African city governments addressing issues of resilience and adaptation to climate change while securing the rights of poor and marginalised urban dwellers?

Lastly, contemporary studies on governance in Africa have focused on institutions and less on agency. Analysing drivers of 'cities turn around' would require insights into leadership and the roles they play in leading city transformation. What kind of leadership has presided over city transformation? What ideological orientation do these leaders have? What is their motivation and where do they get their powers and source of inspiration?

### **Potential Research Projects**

The following potential research projects can be teased out from the nine broad issues discussed in the theme:

- I. Urban governance, politics and management of service provision
- II. Advancing inclusive and just cities
- III. Urban responses to climate change, resilience and adaptation
- IV. Trends in urban economic growth and city transformation
- V. Citizens safety and public security in African Cities

The five listed projects are indicative, meaning many projects can come from a combination of the nine issues discussed in the theme. PASGR is interested in providing funding for established scholars with research interests in this broad field, and will invite proposals that speak to the issues in the theme. PASGR will identify an established African scholar in the area of the theme to be the principal investigator and to provide the intellectual leadership of the projects that may emanate from the theme. The principal investigator (PI) will develop the framework paper that will define the conceptual and analytical lens of the study, the study approach and methodology, develop the overarching research questions, data needs and type of analysis, etc. The PI is also expected to lead the scholarly publications of research findings and their public policy implications. Under the leadership of the PI, country researchers will undertake empirical study in the selected cities. Where fund-raising will be needed PASGR would undertake this responsibility with/without the principal investigator.

Ideally, the PI and country researchers will come from research/academic institutions that are involved in urban studies. This will provide an opportunity for PASGR to discuss institutional partnerships during

project implementation. PASGR intends starting the first project 'urban governance, politics and managerialism in service provision' in January 2015. The principal investigator in consultation with PASGR will identify the appropriate cities and select country researchers.