

**Introductory response to the Concept Note
Public Hearing in the German Bundestag**
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Topic: Urbanisation in Africa – Challenges for Development Cooperation (DC)

Submission:

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Introduction

Africa is the second largest continent in size and population. It's identity is shaped by a drawn-out struggle against colonial dominance and exploitation. It displays considerable difference and diversity across its regions, and hosts a myriad of societies with different languages, cultures and knowledge systems, which survived colonial repression and in some cases genocide. A discussion about urbanization of an entire continent of such diverse nature inevitably involves considerable simplification. While I would like to caution against such simplification, my own submission is inevitably also generalized and simplified. I would nevertheless like to begin by responding to the concept note with a few points through which I hope to refine the understanding of urbanization on the African continent in more qualitative and political terms, introducing north-south interlinkages, ongoing questions of decolonization, and dynamics related to land. I will then turn to the questions posed for Topic Area B.

Urbanization and societal change across Africa – connections to the global North

As the concept note acknowledges, Africa has the second highest rate of urban population growth after Asia. Urbanization on the African continent also needs to be understood as uneven, diverse and differentiated across cities, countries, regions, and the continent. Drivers of the urbanization vary and include conflict, macro-economic policies and processes as well as spatial targeting of development. They include processes in which the most developed nations are implicated. Several examples can be cited. One is support to large scale, export oriented commercial farming which displaces subsistence livelihoods; where this creates employment it involves processes of proletarianization. Another is climate change induced displacement of rural societies where subsistence farming and traditional ways of living are no longer viable.

The dominant consumption based, mobile lifestyles in the global North involving frequent vacation travel, even if lived out in 'smart' and 'sustainable' towns and cities, do contribute more to global emissions than the average lifestyle on the African continent. This is despite inefficiencies in African energy infrastructure. While it is clear that the latter must change,

so must the former. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the first global development commitment that treats the problems of the global South and global North as interconnected. Five years since adoption of the SDGs, there is an opportunity for Germany to encourage a more serious response within Europe. Germany can set the trend for Europe by adopting an ethical stance and leading by example.

Ambitions for development models for Africa to be determined on the African continent

The global North's past and more recent role in societal change in Africa is a feature of contemporary African discourses on the ongoing need for decolonization on the African continent. Linked to this is a renewed discussion on this continent about the 1986 UN Declaration on the Right to Development. Dominant UN member states have resisted operationalizing this global agreement. On the African continent, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights does operationalize this right. The Right to Development includes the right for societies to collectively determine their development and not to have this imposed. It also includes the right to a fairer global deal in which African countries are afforded the fundamental conditions to develop, and to chart their own course for development. The AU's Agenda 2063 translates this into the notion of 'people-driven development' and into the aspiration of becoming an 'influential global player and partner' rather than recipient of aid. This means models for sustainable urban development must arise from the African continent. Woven into processes of urbanization, these need to inform pathways towards realizing the right 'to the continuous improvement of living conditions' set out in the UN's 1976 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The right to an improved standard of living realized through urbanization

Urbanization holds the potential for the realization of the right to continuous improvement of living conditions. Diverse societies on the African continent have responded to urbanization in innovative and resource-efficient ways. The west often identifies what it sees as disorderly 'slums' and urban poverty, and measures this either by deficiencies (in basic infrastructure and western aesthetics) or its inefficiencies (in its minimal contributing to capital accumulation for the urban, national and global economy). However, these same areas are experienced and lived as vibrant, interactive, associational and rich in cultural and economic exchange. A multitude of localized organizations and networks, from reciprocal, cultural or religious to political, form the social fabric that absorbs newcomers in a variety of ways. Realizing the right to continuous improvement of living conditions in cities on the African continent requires a nuanced understanding of this reality. It also requires interrogation into the processes that have acted against infrastructural improvements over many decades. These include elite interests, at best vested in the status quo, at worst vested in land speculation which displaces households out of so-called 'slums'.

Political suspicion of cities and grassroots activism

With the demographic shift that urbanization entails, several African countries, South Africa included, have experienced a strengthening of political opposition to their ruling party. The demand for democratic rule mostly emanates from an urban populace. Given this trend,

dominant political regimes view cities and urbanization with suspicion. In many African countries urban political activism is met with repression from the state. Countries such as Germany can demonstrate decades of productive grassroots activism which has succeeded in shaping urban development, securing commons, and giving expression to the notion of a right to the city.

Urban planning and land management unable to steer urbanization

Western urban planning and regulatory frameworks, prominent across African countries, are ill equipped to mitigate the exploitation, often tied to long-standing, dominant political interests, which keep the so-called 'slums' outside of the reach of urban infrastructure. In resource-rich countries such as South Africa, these interests keep informal settlements in continuous receipt of in costly yet adequate temporary infrastructure. The ill-suited planning processes, linked to conventional systems that manage land rights and land use through property regimes, have failed to steer land use changes in peri-urban areas as cities expand their footprints. The planning systems have allowed inequality to increase over time. Thus islands of western privilege, equipped with conventional infrastructure and increasingly gated, can separate themselves from vast expanses of unserved or underserved, but nevertheless vibrant, urban living environments. Localities of privilege are legitimized by directives to municipalities to attract investment, and by the strong real estate investor appetite for urban land and construction in bankable models. Strengthening individual and collective urban rights of ordinary urban citizens and the mechanisms to invoke these rights are essential for an equitable urbanization process. In addition, a much stronger discourse is needed that seeks alternative and locally appropriate land management mechanisms and brings these into the mainstream.

Topic B: Shifting perspectives: challenges and expectations from Africa

B1

From the African partners' perspective, what are the greatest challenges posed by urbanisation? Do donor nations and partner countries have differing views and definitions of needs? Are there sufficient opportunities for African involvement?

The last question here relates to one of the greatest challenges posed by urbanisation on the African continent, and that is the need for development models (including models of sustainability) to be determined (and resourced) locally and not to be imposed. However, there is no clear line to be drawn, as imposed development models have already shaped and determined development patterns, and these have also taken on a logic of their own. Interests are vested in them. They cannot simply be replaced. An important argument is to be made for resourcing of localized knowledge production, while also acknowledging plurality of knowledge systems (with different normative approaches), particularly in changing peri-urban areas.

A further challenge lies in the dispossession that the process of urban expansion involves. This relates to the real estate investment opportunities that open up as agricultural land use gives way to subdivisions for urban use. Real estate investments may be made for the sake

of the investment rather than responding to local need. If investors are a necessary evil, better rules must be imposed or incentives provided to ensure responsible investment. Governments' inability to achieve this points to the weakness in urban planning and regulatory mechanism mentioned above. Therefore the urbanization process remains uneven, involving enrichment as well as impoverishment. Women's rights may be particularly precarious in these processes of change, and largely overlooked.

B2

What kind of support for urban development is expected from Germany, the EU and international institutions such as the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), and which mechanisms would be appropriate? Should the focus be on regional and country-specific broad-scale measures or, rather, on model projects with a clearly defined best practice role (key phrase: charter city)?

There is urgency to do things differently, to show case innovation, and leapfrog in ways that avoid repeating the infrastructure mistakes made by the west. However, there is also the need for long term commitments to the difficult work of shifting the way things are done. Realizing the right to an improved standard of living in the urbanization processes calls for the tailoring of interventions in innovative ways, but also for stitching these into policy, budgetary and programmatic commitments of the relevant government entities. This may take five to ten years. UN-Habitat's Participatory Slum Upgrading Program (PSUP) has over many years carried out the unglamorous work of building understanding and capacity as well as frameworks in governments of least developed countries on the African continent to work in participatory and democratic ways with local communities, avoiding displacement even where occupied land is eyed for its real estate potential. The Global Land Tool Network (GLTN), also hosted by UN-Habitat, has complimented this with diverse and dynamic alternative systems for the protection and management of land rights.

Although weaknesses have been identified within UN-Habitat, this agency plays an important role on the African continent in providing a normative counterpoint to the aggressively capitalist advice that well-resourced urban consultants package for African governments. In the debate in the run-up to UN's Habitat III summit in 2016 as to whether to terminate UN-Habitat, African governments supported its continued existence, evidently seeing value in its support to country governments.

B3

Are existing institutions and stakeholders up to the challenge? Are reforms or new forms and pathways for cooperation needed here? What experience has been gained with the Chinese models of infrastructural investment, how are they rated, and what role will they play in future?

Often forgotten stakeholders are civil society organizations and autonomous grassroots movements and formations. Within the local democratic processes, they play the important role of holding governments to account. They are also an important force in calling for reform of policy or legislation. Given the mentioned suspicion and repression with which such organizations are treated, dialogue is needed with countries such as Germany and its cities that have examples of citizen-led initiatives and collective claiming of rights.

For governments unable to secure funds for infrastructure development, Chinese support is welcomed and Chinese models of rapid development are embraced, even if these involve compromises, for instance to the principle of prioritising local labour. However, Chinese development models are adapting towards more sustainable models. As with most donor countries, Chinese development cooperation has opened avenues for Chinese developers in many African countries. These have displayed phenomenal capacity but constructions is seldom based on what is most needed. As China, like other cooperation partners, seeks to secure a long term presence on the continent, its approaches respond to criticism and have become more nuanced over time.

B4.

Should European partners support social service provision, participation or public safety in African cities and if so, how? What role can city partnerships play in shaping urban and social development on the African continent?

Social service provision, participation and public safety are mutually dependant and need to be advanced together. Much experience has been gained over the past two decades with citizen-led urban safety initiatives, but the role of social service provision by the state, and a general state presence in any area, is deemed crucial for the sustained achievement of public safety. Civil society organisations have also been found to pay a critical role in ensuring urban safety.

Participation must be advanced not for the sake of participation but towards greater conscientisation of urban citizens and towards furthering of a discourse that ultimately leads to governments adopting policy changes. It is important to strengthen civil/grassroot society's ability to hold governments to account, to interrogate speculation and to counter socioeconomic segregation and urban elitism. Partnerships across carefully paired towns or cities should be encouraged to nurture a discourse in which the more difficult but critical topics of decolonization can be folded into questions not only of participation, public safety and social service provision but also of the economy.

B5.

Are traditional lifestyles still relevant or have they already broken down as a result of migration and urbanisation?

Urbanization inevitably involves a level of cultural assimilation. However, pluralism defines generations with a migration or peri-urbanization experience. Within the continued pluralism that characterizes many urban societies on the African continent, indigenous knowledge remains a resource. This informs not only survival mechanisms at times of crisis, but can also shape consumption and lifestyles in sustainable ways. In formal development processes, this is a largely untapped resource, and one that is too often wished away.