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A research contribution to The Future of African Cities project

Tswalu Dialogue Report

Future of African Cities



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Strengthening Africa's economic performance



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Introduction

The Brenthurst Foundation's *Future of African Cities* project was formally launched at the Tswalu Dialogue at the Kalahari Tswalu Reserve in South Africa, 20–22 May 2016. Participants at the dialogue included senior officials representing many of the cities on the list of case studies that will form the bedrock of the project, as well as experts on urbanisation and development. The dialogue was chaired by the Chairman of The Brenthurst Foundation, Olusegun Obasanjo, the former President of Nigeria, and the former Prime Minister of Kenya, Raila Odinga. The former Prime Minister of Togo, Gilbert Huongbo, and the

Premier of Gauteng province (SA), David Makhura, were amongst other notable attendees. Through extensive field work, original research and collaboration, the project aims to highlight policy options and practical actions that can be taken to harness the key megatrends impacting Africa – from rapid demographic expansion to technological advancements – to promote stability and economic growth. The objective of the inaugural dialogue on African cities was to subject the project's methodology and research questions to critical examination, in the light of international best practice and experiences.

Project and Methodology

Session I set out in detail the context, aims and unique features of the *Future of African Cities* project. The context is well known: by 2035 more Africans will live in cities than in the countryside. By 2050 Africa's population is projected to reach 2.5 billion. Historically the trends of population growth and urbanisation have increased productivity and economic growth, lifting millions out of poverty. Planning and skills will help to ensure this demographic expansion is a dividend and not a disaster – as many fear, owing to the relative fragility of Africa's institutions. If African economies do not become more stable and resilient, increasing connectedness could set the stage for uncontrolled migration, domestic social protest and insecurity.

The project aims to highlight policy options and practical actions that can be taken to harness the key megatrends impacting Africa

The project is sensitive to the fact that urbanisation globally is the focus of significant research and study by myriad organisations. There is, thus, a need to emphasise 'what's different?' about this particular research enterprise. Its main pillars – governance, infrastructure, human capital, and security – are not

unique, though it is the way these core elements are framed around the concept of a city's 'fighting power' (a military concept), as a way of considering organisational effectiveness, that is distinct. Conceptualising the core challenges through this lens should afford novel insights into a panoply of issues around the development of Africa's urban areas. The 'morale' component of cities and city life, for instance, is rarely adequately captured in existing literature on urbanisation yet the framework adopted for this study could yield a number of key findings around this subject. The project will publicise its findings with a book, a TV documentary and through the use of social media.

Responses and Q/A

The draft background papers circulated in advance of the meeting elicited a number of questions regarding the scope and methodology of the project, as was their intention. In addition, a number of tensions and potential trade-offs were highlighted during the course of the dialogue, some of which were not given sufficient weight in the papers.

Of particular note were the importance of ensuring the 'validity' of cross-city comparisons, particularly between African and non-African urban experiences, as well as particular features that might be characteristic of the Francophone world as opposed to Lusophone or Anglophone. The necessity of having common bases for comparisons will be

a *sine qua non* of the project. This salutary observation related to being mindful of the ‘starting points’ of cities. In one sense this speaks to the ways many cities were laid out in accordance to the extractive needs of economic interests in the 19th century, which carried forward in the 20th century, thus forcing contemporary urban planners, operating to a different set of objectives, to redesign *against* the original structural features of the city. In another sense, it relates to the condition of local resources (especially human capital) that can be brought to bear to generate the type of ‘best practice urban growth’ (Singapore, Seoul) that Africa’s burgeoning cities seek to emulate. A vital tension that merits further interrogation is the fate of urban slums: can generalisations be made on whether it is better to demolish slums and build new housing to generalised standards; or upgrade slums and thus effectively reify such habitats, economies and communities as important contributors to a wider civic space? Evidence from Latin America in particular has demonstrated the extraordinary heterogeneity of slums, their distinct vibrancies and the need to address them on their own particular terms. A corollary to this key question is how we conceptualise what a ‘successful city’ looks like. Can profoundly unequal cities – acute squalor alongside booming prosperity – ever be considered ‘successful’ regardless of how much investment they attract? Whichever path a city chooses, it should be guided by its own definition of ‘success’. Owning and articulating an urban vision is key. A key theme in the discussions which percolated throughout is identifying how to create holistic solutions for cities, not policies which clearly privilege certain constituencies over others. This is clearly one of the starkest challenges facing emerging urban areas.

The multifaceted relationship between security and urbanisation was approached from a number of perspectives during the discussions, from concrete policy recommendations around policing skills, capacity and resources, to less tangible characteristics such as ‘virtual hinterlands’ and complex diaspora connections. A key emphasis in any security environment is the legitimacy of the people charged with ensuring public safety and order. The (usually grave) consequences of security forces losing credibility with locals, as occurred in Rio de Janeiro’s *favelas*, were highlighted, as were continuing urban challenges

related to vulnerable parts of society becoming alienated from – or never having felt included in – the urban mainstreams. Increases in the numbers of police or army are not necessarily the best antidotes to insecurity; rather, exploring ways that cities can become more ‘self-securing’ is key. It was pointedly argued by one participant that things are moving in the opposite direction in many cities, even in Europe. Referring to Brussels and the city’s nascent reputation as a breeding ground for extremists, it was argued that we need to better understand the dangers inhering from the way certain marginalised groups ‘don’t live in society’ but ‘live along society’ instead.

Can profoundly unequal cities ever be considered ‘successful’ regardless of how much investment they attract?

Opinion varies on the ways technology will impact the development of African cities, though no one present doubted that it will be a critical factor. The universality of social media and near-instantaneous flow of information and imagery has made transparent the challenges of urban living to rural dwellers in search of better livelihood options in the cities. The reality of urban squalor and dashed expectations of new arrivals may, according to some participants, have the effect of stemming the flow of people to cities. In this vein, it was suggested that global experience ought to be combed for examples of policy interventions that succeeded in at least controlling population movements in a way that conforms to national planning objectives for regions and small- and medium-sized cities. Other participants cautioned against taking a perspective on urbanisation rooted in past experiences given the role of new technologies, especially mobile technology in countries where penetration is virtually 100 per cent, which will impact urban development enormously, yet precisely how requires more detailed study. There is a welter of data on mobile telephony developments and trends in Africa that is openly available and ought to be fully exploited in the course of the project research. Key, too, will be the ability of cities

to harness new forms of geo-spatial planning, the tools of which are more accessible than ever before.

As ever, some consideration was given to identifying what the wildcards or ‘black swans’ affecting urbanisation in Africa will be and how the resilience of cities can be developed in order to withstand unanticipated shocks to urban systems. The idea of

‘urban tipping points’ was raised as a useful framing concept to assess cities’ vulnerabilities across four different layers: the physical terrain (geography, climate); infrastructure (the built environment); the human terrain (people); and virtual infrastructure (technology, connectedness).

International Analogues

The specific cities-based research which informed subsequent discussions touched on experiences in Latin America and Asia. Throughout Latin America, crime and public safety was the principal concern of city-dwellers. This held for cities across the region, even where improvements in security were evident, such as in the northeastern Brazilian city of Recife, which invested in more resources and sophisticated policing efforts to tackle the city’s crime epidemic. The experience of Recife is illustrative of the linkages between crime and core economic issues such as jobs, basic services and infrastructure. The importance of planning was driven home powerfully in the brief overview of Curitiba, initiator of the BRT system which has been replicated in one form or another numerous times globally in the past two decades. Curitiba not only offers acute lessons in how to get people around cities most efficiently within a particular set of constraints, but also of continuity in both city programmes and often the tenure of key officials.

The idea of ‘urban tipping points’ was raised as a useful framing concept to assess cities’ vulnerabilities

Colombia, a state once synonymous with narco-gangsterism, offers powerful lessons in turning around embattled cities once thought incurable. Overall Colombia has succeeded in altering its security environment in holistic ways that have permitted significant improvements in peoples’ lives, though the overall effort is far from complete. Once the world’s most dangerous city, Medellin is a telling

example of urban recovery, driven initially by major capacity improvements across the security landscape (including better intelligence co-operation internally and externally), which paved the way for innovations in infrastructure and transport development, all of which improved lives from the lowest earners to the highest. As ever, local ownership of both the problem and the solutions was critical.

The transformation of the city-state of Singapore from an Asian backwater where two-thirds of its 1.5 million inhabitants lived in slums in 1965 to global economic star where 90 per cent of its people own their own homes in an increasingly ‘green’ city where no-one lives in slums is, in many ways, *the* development story most developing countries seek to emulate. The Singaporean story has been subjected to countless analyses, most of which highlight the centrality of good governance, continuously evolving planning and reinvention, frugality, delivery, all underpinned by a commercial mindset and active promotion of national interests. Although Singapore has become something of a cliché in development circles, its success obscures the difficult choices, sometimes fraught politics, and assiduous planning and execution behind it. In neighbouring Indonesia, success has been less clear-cut, and its history of political upheaval and patronage politics still exercise brakes on the more ambitious plans of its cities. Yet notable progress is evident, with strong focus on transport development and housing infrastructure to meet the needs of its large population centres, not least Jakarta where more than 10 million Indonesians reside.

The contexts to each particular urban experience has to be understood on their own terms, yet a number of commonalities and lessons from such disparate

urban experiences in Asia and Latin America can be drawn.

- Security is the foundation without which little else can be achieved and sustained.
- A whole-of-government approach, underpinned by a commonly accepted plan or strategy, is necessary.
- In setting priorities, compromise and co-ordination are critical.
- Recognition of the context is critical, what works in one city may not in another.
- Continuous adaptation and reflection is key.
- Use crises to a city's advantage, creating step-changes in terms of reform and development.
- Ensure that any big infrastructure passes rigorous needs testing, so as to avoid white elephants/prestige projects.

Responses and Q/A

The experiences of select Latin American and Asian cities were a salutary reminder to African cities that recasting and renewal are possible even in the gravest circumstances. Both Singapore and Medellin were once stricken by acute insecurity due to drug-related gang activity, yet each found their own means to overcome the problem. In each, difficult decisions were required to win the populous over to the local government's cause. El Salvador faced similar problems of crippling insecurity fuelled by gang activity, which severely weakened state and municipal institutions. When the country found ways to grip the crisis and take destiny in their own hands in the 1990s, El Salvador achieved a remarkable turnaround in its economic fortunes, attaining investment-grade destination status and becoming for a time second only to Chile in investors' grading in Latin America. Yet, with considerable volatility at the political level in the past decade, and constantly rotating personnel at the top of key organs of state, El Salvador has experienced a serious relapse and once again security concerns are ubiquitous across society. El Salvador's backsliding demonstrates that solutions are dynamic, ie they can be reversed, especially if those solutions are always guided by short-term imperatives rather than long-term objectives. The case of San Salvador's powerful gangs reinforces the importance of examining networks of extra-legal activity affecting cities, as well as patterns of migration and out-migration.

It could be argued that Latin America presages Africa's own future, in the sense that the continent not only has an historic infrastructure of violence, economic marginalisation and slumification dating back to colonial times, but the continent has in recent times also been a laboratory of innovation for trying to address these manifold challenges. It has gone through massive demographic, economic and political transitions, in the same way Africa currently experiences similar epochal changes. The dynamics of urban violence in Latin America are also highly instructive for Africa in the way it is highly concentrated spatially and associated with very particular activities and behaviours. The same goes for rates of income and social inequality, which are highly correlated with violence and insecurity. Yet sharp differences are also evident. In Latin America, municipal government is often perceived as a stepping stone to national government, if not the head of state, whereas in Africa cities have been characterised by weak municipal leaders with minimal statutory powers. In parts of Africa cities do not have mayors in any meaningful sense, but rather governance is controlled from the provincial or state level. The idea of civic responsibility and civic pride – the morale component of urbanisation – were flagged as significant drivers of successful cities that encompass various forms of self-regulation: mutually reinforcing ties and interests that represent important pillars of municipal 'governance without government'.

The dynamics of urban violence in Latin America is also highly instructive for Africa in the way it is highly concentrated spatially and associated with very particular activities and behaviours

The idea of an 'index of competitiveness for cities' met with broad approval from the participants. This would link neatly with the concept of a city's 'fighting power', and could include, for example, a triple bottom line of: security and inclusiveness; business ease/enterprise; and rate of growth of disposable

income. On the latter, data consistently shows that an increase of disposable income allows people to tolerate low inclusivity, but when people stop seeing the pathways to growth it leads to an increase of violence and unrest. As any measure of competitiveness will need to go beyond economic indicators, it was suggested that such an index would also need to comprise some measure of urban liveability and inclusivity (assessed on race, class, and/or gender measures). A number of key impediments to competitiveness, which prevent African cities from realising the kind of potential evident in urban areas elsewhere, were

highlighted. Prominent among them were levels of competence and capacity; poorly articulated visions (or none at all) for Africa's cities, especially their slum areas; and the persistent dynamics of group (whether tribe, religion or clan) competition, which often precludes African cities from exploiting the full scope of talent across their complex human and cultural landscapes. A final suggestion centred on the utility of a taxonomy of cities, which might not only assist in framing valid comparisons across cities but also help with forecasts and scenario building.

The Experience of Practitioners

In considering how we address the past, present and future of cities in concrete ways, numerous insights arose in discussions around specific cities slated for case-study analyses in the project.

A brief overview of East London in the Buffalo City metropolitan area of South Africa's Eastern Cape province, an area home to roughly 75 000 people in a territory that was once part of the tribal homeland system (Bantustans) devised under the apartheid regime, revealed a city straining under acute pressures of unemployment, de-industrialisation and weak relations between the private sector and government. To escape its current malaise Buffalo City will, among other existing challenges, need to exploit its comparative advantage (in its case, probably labour supply) though to do so requires a host of other policy interventions and building bridges between constituencies that have struggled to create unity of effort.

Any measure of competitiveness will need to go beyond economic indicators

Cape Town, in neighbouring Western Cape province, has myriad drawing cards which have helped the city attract considerable domestic and foreign investment and also developed a skills pipeline into the city's economy, which boasts a workforce

comprising significant numbers from other provinces. Underpinning its attractive investment climate is the quality of its infrastructure and governance, as well as very specific touchstone interventions – such as measures to prevent any significant losses to the city's water supply and flow – which serve to differentiate the city. At the same time, Cape Town, despite its international reputation, suffers from a lack of connectivity (notably air links) to other markets and growing numbers of informal settlements.

Morocco is home to ancient historic cities which confront an array of challenges, many of which are unique to those contexts. Cities like the university town of Ifrane, the capital, Rabat, and Fez, founded over a 1 000 years ago and today home to one million people in a densely populated urban area, raise different questions about priorities and deployment of resources. In Fez, competency in city planning and management is in short supply, amplifying the already daunting task of restoration and perseveration of the city's unique heritage while ensuring its inhabitants live in an ever-more connected, 'smart' and liveable city. Two of the key trends which will affect Morocco's cities going forward is the decentralisation of power to the country's regions and the growing emphasis on the empowerment of women – both of which should impact the way its cities are run significantly.

The three Kenyan cities under consideration – Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa – evoke the starkest urban challenges around health, housing, education, unemployment and security. They reveal

how some cities are being tested to their limits. Both Nairobi and Mombasa have been subjected to intensive study, producing city masterplans that should guide their development. Nairobi in particular has myriad programmes to improve transport and put an end to its infamous traffic jams, increase energy efficiency (through solar power) and improve water distribution networks, yet the city is still racked by very poor urban infrastructure. Nairobi is also home to perhaps the largest slum in Africa, Kibera, whose fate speaks to earlier questions over renewal, upgrading or demolition alternatives. There can be no doubt that Kibera's slums have produced remarkable entrepreneurs and there is a strong sense of community – yet equally there exists tremendous suspicion of, if not enmity towards, government. Major urban development projects are slated for all three cities but as ever the elephant in the room is capital – there are limited domestic sources of funding to support these projects. More attention is required on the everyday experiences of people living in slums, especially in cities like Kisumu – home to five slums, wherein various NGOs operate – so more inclusive solutions to Africa's urban challenges can be devised.

Perceived biases in national political priorities were deemed detrimental to the growth prospects of certain urban areas in South Africa

Abuja and Kaduna in Nigeria pose further questions about urban growth, especially where leadership is concerned. Kaduna is a highly urbanised state, with six out of its nine million inhabitants residing in cities. What's more, 85 per cent are under 35 years of age. The lack of social cohesion leaves this population, in particular, vulnerable and exposed. The main city, Kaduna, does not have an empowered mayoralty or central authority, in part because officials at state and national level maintain that city planning, training and managing is still in its infancy in Nigeria and considerable training in these skills is required before power is decentralised to local level. In the nation's capital, Abuja, where 65 per cent are under 35, the best of city planning and organisation

is evident. A combination of leadership, competence and political will enabled the city to avoid the fate of Lagos – to which it was once moving – although insecurity in the capital, in the shape of attacks by violent extremists, remains a ubiquitous concern as does the uncontrolled growth of satellite towns.

Responses and Q/A

The issue of competition between cities arose most pointedly in the case of South Africa, where perceived biases in national political priorities were deemed detrimental to the growth prospects of certain urban areas. Theoretically the job of national governments should be to set the conditions for which cities can compete on an even playing field and drive economic growth, yet when successful metropolitan areas like Cape Town suck people and resources away from other cities – akin to an internal brain drain – is it the job of national authorities to intervene to redress the balance and mitigate the negative consequences for some cities? Does the South African government prioritise the retention of Johannesburg and Gauteng as the economic hub of the country? The relationship between cities and national governments is clearly an area of acute concern to city planners, who do not want to be constrained by national policies as they seek to become growth nodes and drivers of opportunities – not just within their own countries but, in the case of Cape Town, on the world stage.

Cities, in general, want to be their own bosses, especially over fiscal matters. Their ability to manage and raise their own finances is a near-universal point of contention. More research is needed into the innovative ways cities can finance their plans, such as direct lending by DFIs to cities. Otherwise, capital is simply a function of cities' capacity to raise taxes and local institutional investors (municipal debts, social security, pension funds). One key reminder was that cities that are well run generally don't default. But none of this can happen unless the national government allows cities to step up and be the owners of their own development.

That said, not all cities feel under the cosh of national governments, and some have managed to carve out their own space to drive a growth agenda. One example from the US cited in the discussions was the state of Kentucky, an unlikely success story. It managed to create an effective Team City approach

and devised a unique value proposition despite some ineluctable disadvantages. Critical in this is the idea of cities as ‘good partners’ for companies seeking to invest. Their experience suggests that too much focus on constraints and regulations is counter-productive; what you need instead, one participant articulated, was a relentless focus on forward-looking visions and getting coalitions of the willing behind you: replacing ‘vested interests’ with ‘interests in success’.

The linkages between regional cities and how they knit together economically, culturally and otherwise is poorly understood. Yet tapping into these linked networks could pay huge economic dividends, both for investors and the cities themselves. Greater understanding of the ways, for example, Maputo links in as a feeder port to Dar es Salaam, will help facilitate more integrated solutions to their respective

urbanisation challenges. Aiding the process of more integrated solutions would, several participants noted, be more meetings and conferences involving Africa’s mayors. There are real opportunities to shape a new conversation on urban development in Africa through much greater exchange and interaction between the continent’s city authorities. Lastly, so often forgotten in discussions and planning for cities are the residents themselves. Engagement between city authorities and residents needs to be improved across the continent. Plans that take into account citizen’s views and promote the type of programmes that align to their concerns are all the more likely to drive other helpful improvements to urban areas. To assume simple acquiescence is a recipe for discord and turmoil.

A Brief Word on Gauteng

The international media frenzy over the migration crisis in Europe obscures some of the bigger movements of people elsewhere in the world, not least in the South African province of Gauteng, where 250 000 migrants have been arriving each year in a province with about 13 million residents. This creates something of a powder keg in places like Johannesburg, particularly in the informal settlements around the city in which most migrants find themselves living. The stark concern in Gauteng, as elsewhere, is that the rate of economic growth is not keeping up to meet the demands of the new arrivals, nor existing inhabitants. The Gauteng government has prioritised good governance and the development of the province’s human capital and infrastructure, but is

ever mindful that, if the promise of urbanisation is not fulfilled, it can turn into an urban nightmare, particularly in the form of xenophobia, as seen in the recent past. The province’s aim is to instead harness the tremendous pool of talent represented by African migrants and attract the continent’s most talented academics and innovators. The government is also committed – through its investment centre and other means – to sharing lessons and learnings from the experience of other cities, like Addis Ababa, but also its own counterparts within South Africa, such as Cape Town. What ‘keeps the government awake at night’ is the challenge of meeting the expectations of its rapidly growing population.



Opportunities, Enablers, and Key Metrics

To conclude the dialogue, participants were given a list of constraints and then invited to identify key opportunities, enablers and metrics which are summarised in the table below.

A second dialogue is planned for April/May 2017 once some of the initial cities field work has been completed.

CONSTRAINTS

- Poor regulation
- Weak infrastructure
- Crime, and perceptions thereof
- Migrancy, esp of skilled and energetic
- Lack of policy and government continuity
- Efficiencies
- National vs city: financing and policy
- Overfocus on big infrastructure rather than soft infrastructure/capacity
- Consumption not investment directed
- Absence of critical mass
- Weather, and changes to
- Bureaucratisation/Ease of doing business
- Lack of power
- Political violence
- Perverse incentives
- Lack of diversification
- Lack of regional integration
- Absence of democracy
- Lack of value chains
- Lack of legitimacy
- Health systems, and of workforce
- Unemployment
- Lack of finance
- Corruption
- Income inequality
- Lack of hard data
- Competitiveness
- Protectionism/openness
- Top-down over bottom-up
- Technology penetration
- Planning capacity and implementation
- Misalignment of political and functional boundaries
- Public-private hostility
- Skills and education
- Weak and rival systems of governance
- Productivity
- Political leadership/will
- Connectivity
- External assistance unmatched to internal needs
- Militarisation of security
- Social division (sectarian, racial, tribal, gender, urban/rural, familial), marginalisation and alienation
- Generational divide
- Spatial geography

OPPORTUNITIES

- Young, energetic population
- Economies of urban scale
- Remittances
- Widespread recognition of importance of African leadership and ownership
- Gender equality and participation
- Labour availability
- Low bar of growth/income
- Growing domestic and regional market
- Agriculture/land/water
- Food security, and safety
- Financing possibilities; public and private
- Density of housing
- New, leapfrogging technologies
- Mineral wealth
- Government models that mobilise talents
- Entrepreneurial energy/instinct
- Lack of diversification
- International goodwill/ interest in preventing migration
- Green economy

ENABLERS

- Regulatory efficiency and responsiveness
- Competitiveness
- Finance
- Alignment of boundaries/ authorities
- Technology
- Governance
- University and higher education linkages and expertise
- Entrepreneurship
- Policy and planning
- Digitisation, technology communications
- Community participation
- Skills/capacity/education
- Youth programmes (including cadets)
- Healthy population, health-care
- Service delivery
- Ease of start-ups: nurturing, registration and funding
- Population density
- Population centrism
- Leadership/will
- Lifestyle attractiveness
- Spatial planning
- Lifestyle attractiveness
- Falling price and ease of delivery of energy
- Tourism
- Housing, electricity and other infrastructure
- Velocity of goods/money
- Ease of trade and international markets
- R & D
- Informal economy
- Diaspora
- Apprenticeships/ vocational training

METRICS OF SUCCESS

- GDP growth/ disposable income
- Political violence
- Crime rates
- Cost and ease of logistics
- FDI inflows
- Widening, then reducing inequality
- Transparency
- Housing delivery and ownership
- Labour productivity
- Nutritional intakes
- Ease of doing business
- Levels of investment (disaggregated)
- HDI ranking
- Construction activity, housing take-up
- Innovation standing
- Payment of taxes/GDP
- Unemployment rates
- SDGs, including gender equality and literacy
- R & D flows
- Economic value addition