

POLICY BRIEF

# URBANPOLICY COALITIONS

CITIES  
ALLIANCE  
AFRICA  
THINK  
TANK



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# Background And Introduction

There is currently a common consensus between different international agencies, regional bodies and national and sub-national governments in Africa on the key development challenges that require cogent policy responses in Africa, and the transformative role of urbanization and cities in addressing them. This consensus is reflected in a spate of recent policy documents<sup>1</sup> that seek to address Africa's pressing development and policy challenges through jointly pursuing agendas for structural transformation through embracing urbanization and sustainable development prerogatives.

Africa and its cities face a host of developmental challenges that structural transformation and transition to sustainability are required to address. The proportion of slum dwellers in urban Africa has risen from 31 per cent in 1995 to 62 per cent in 2012<sup>2</sup>. Coupled with this, and despite the high levels of economic growth that African economies have generally exhibited,

levels of inequality in Africa remain well above the global average (i.e. an average Gini coefficient of 0.58, compared to the global average of 0.4). Moreover informality remains the majority condition of Africa in general, contributing 55 per cent to GDP and employing 80 per cent of Africa's labour force. The informal sector hosts almost half of the urban population in Africa, in terms of where they live and the livelihoods they pursue. Access to quality, efficient and affordable infrastructure provisions and services remains a pressing and key challenge for all sub-regions in Africa, especially where water, energy and transportation are concerned.

Women and the youth – who make up a large<sup>3</sup> proportion of the population and are referred to as the “youth bulge” – are disproportionately affected by the aforementioned development challenges. So is the emerging “middle class”, whose potential to boost growth has been widely reported, but who remain precariously

balanced between poverty and stability. The middle class consists of around 20 per cent of the overall population, who live on between 2-20 USD per day; approximately 60 per cent of that 20 per cent actually live on between 2-4 USD per day<sup>4</sup>. Hence, their household budgets are vulnerable to exogenous factors that impact on food, water, energy and transport costs (i.e. “nexus effects”). The youth bulge, and the emerging middle class, are critical to the success or failure of the desired transition, as they constitute both the potential consumer base and work force upon whose stability it depends<sup>5</sup>.

Emerging medium and long-term challenges – such as fostering resilience to climate change, resource scarcity and intensity, and environmental degradation – are critical, additional factors to take into account where urban development decisions are concerned, especially with respect to infrastructure and technology choices, as well as urban design and planning. In addition, special emphasis

on the vulnerability of informal and slum settlements is required, and consultative, participatory mechanisms are necessary to boost local resilience.

The challenge for policy is to adequately address these wide-ranging, yet key challenges, while ensuring that macro-economic transition is ensured. African economies are still dominated by extractive and agrarian activities, low levels of industrialisation, and the emergence of tertiary sector activities (finance, insurance, real-estate, banking and telecommunications)<sup>6</sup>. This bifurcated growth path presents the most critical macro-economic challenge; as it means that the rapidly growing youth and active age working population are not absorbed into formal and/or sustainable economic activities<sup>7</sup>. The remedy is widely agreed to require widespread industrialisation, beneficiation and value add, requiring structural transformation and diversification of African economies<sup>8</sup>.

Cities are critical to achieving this transformation, due to their high rates of population<sup>9</sup> and economic<sup>10</sup> growth<sup>11</sup>, and their particular relevance as sites where a variety of activities, sectors, functions and processes converge and overlap in the processes of urbanisation. They hence have the potential for economic diversification and industrialisation that can translate at the macro-economic scale and facilitate large-scale transition. The key urban policy challenges are to ensure that policy frameworks ensure inclusive growth, reduce inequality and stabilise household and local government budgets. Moreover, the expansion of cost effective, efficient and accessible infrastructure development and service delivery provisions, and innovation – at the policy level, but as well as with respect to technology and systems – are critical to achieving this vision.

It also requires that different spheres of governance (national, regional and local) and top-down and bottom-

up processes of engagement are brought together in implementation. In this respect – and noting that the importance of governance as stressed in the Africa Common Position for Habitat III – the African Economic Outlook 2016 stresses that multi-level governance (MLG) is a necessary and crucial component of achieving this vision. Within this context, the role of urban policy coalitions requires careful consideration and positioning, as they can potentially play a key role in helping establish consensus on what urban development priorities are essential, what measures need to be taken to act on them, and how they should be implemented.

# Why do Coalitions Matter?

African cities are places that are characterised by stark dual formal-informal sectors, elite and private sector capture of development agendas, insecure land tenure for slum and informal settlement dwellers, uneven power relations, contestation, and exclusionary governance practises, as well as a dire lack of access to infrastructures and service provisions for the vast majority of the urban citizenry<sup>12</sup>. They are typically constituted of a diverse citizenry who have vastly different levels of access to power over decision-making and implementation of urban development strategies and plans. Hence, mechanisms – such as coalitions – are required so that diverse interests and priorities, can be filtered and channelled through consensus, and that can act as venues for reconciling differences, partnering, as well as airing and debating conflicting positions and priorities on an even playing field. Coalitions matter greatly where the need to ensure that the functions of governance are

held to account in terms of prioritisation, effectiveness and efficiency are paramount, as is the case when resources and implementation capacities are limited. However, they are especially relevant where the functions of policy are concerned i.e. generating creative and innovative ways of seeing and doing, that is; through sharing information and ideas, discussion, debate and engagement, as well as drawing on emerging culture, indigenous knowledge systems and customary practises. For example, reinventing place-making in African cities should ideally involve widespread participation<sup>13</sup> and coalition-building in order to ensure that the diverse interests, priorities, lived experiences and cultures of the local urban citizenry are adequately catered for.

# What are Coalitions?

In this brief, coalitions are understood to be broad formations that bring together diverse mandate bearing stakeholders that agree to cooperate and exchange views and information on specific issues or in the interest of development of a particular site, neighbourhood or cluster. They can be interest-based, issue-based or governance-based<sup>14</sup>. That is, coalitions are broad-based forums for interaction in which participatory processes and consultative leadership are given priority. They can serve as mechanisms for resolving the way forward (in terms of vision and strategy) and what actions need to be taken and how they should be undertaken (in terms of planning and implementation). Coalitions are typically constituted of different stakeholders; including government, sector representatives, interest and issue-based groups, as well as community, grassroots and religious organisations, strategic intermediaries and so forth. They can coalesce

and coordinate with action networks that can act as more tightly bounded coalitions or networks that draw together individual actors that strategize on how to move specific agendas forward, often informally.

# Multi-Level Governance and Coalitions in Africa

Many African governments have undergone successive waves of decentralisation, yet there has been a substantial lack of progress due to deficiency of revenue and capacity to govern effectively at local scales. Cities Alliance Africa Think Tank proposes that a “fit for purpose” multi-level governance system<sup>15</sup> is required to bridge the gap in finance and institutional capacity between national and local levels, one that draws on different sectors of society to actualise.

Decision-making in urban domains is in turn dependent on national decision-making (e.g. over infrastructures) and funding channels, regional dynamics, as well as local contextual specificities, binding constraints, and potentials (e.g. for innovation and to harness place-based opportunities). Multi-level governance is required to ensure cohesion between development programs and activities that act at (or across) different scales, and which have a significant bearing on local urban

contexts<sup>16</sup>. It is also required so that the necessary skills, leadership and platforms that are distributed throughout society can be harnessed for effective governance, especially when those skills do not reside in local government. That is, adaptive, shared and cooperative governance is required to meet diverse African urban challenges instead of solely top-down systems of governance that typically struggle to generate new and/or creative solutions and approaches<sup>17</sup>.

Typically, local governments in Africa are not sufficiently resourced with the capacity to achieve broad-based agreement with society regarding its challenges, and to agree on what actions should be taken to address them and enact transition. Coalitions can help coordinate, reinforce and harness desirable tendencies and negate undesirable ones, and assist with generating creative solutions to local challenges. Coalitions can also play a useful role in negating governance risks such as political hijacking,

elite capture and corruption, and help improve levels of transparency in governance. They can help facilitate shared understanding and appreciation of future threats and challenges – such as youth unemployment, climate change, and resource scarcity – and grow local consensus with respect to programmes of action, building active citizen engagement and support at the same time. In practise, however, coalitions can also act contrary to these objectives, hence the role and quality of leadership is important, that is; consultative, determined, ethical and transparent leadership is required.

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# Role of Leadership and Considerations for Coalition Building

Leadership is the crux of effective and impactful coalitions. Due to the high level of diversity – i.e. of interests and priority issues, as well as groups – within African cities, distributed forms of leadership will be required to facilitate urban transitions towards sustainable, equitable and efficiently run cities. This distributed leadership will need to emerge from various sectors – from all levels of government, civil society (grassroots community, slum-dweller, youth, women and other organisations), political parties, academia, religious bodies, traditional organisations and leaders, and so forth – all relevant avenues through which sectoral and other activities are led in local urban societies. Distributed leadership is also necessary, so that programmes can draw on the various capacities (e.g. skills, platforms, strategic intermediaries, and action networks) in society to effect change.

Critically, coalitions require leadership where key infrastructure choices in energy, transport and ICT are concerned, as these are interdependent and vital for successful transitions to sustainable urban growth and living, and for enhancing access to services and mobility in African cities<sup>18</sup>. They help enable regional scale governance and planning to support infrastructure investments and management of essential resources (e.g. water catchments, urban agricultural lands, coastal zones, ecosystems and ecosystem services, and so forth)<sup>19</sup>.

Coalitions have a strong role to play in ensuring the delivery mechanisms for services (e.g. social enterprises, public-private partnerships) and that services are adequately oriented and effective. Other critical areas include; water and sanitation, urban agriculture, food security, healthcare, public safety, recreational and green spaces, spaces for cultural expression

and worship, vulnerability to forced removals, extortion, and so forth. In this respect, coalitions can provide the urban citizenry, and their selected leaders, with vehicles to address asymmetrical relationships, decision-making priorities and distribution of resources in African cities. They also have a strong role to play in generating innovative strategies, policies, plans and solutions that meet local demands in unique ways.

From a leadership perspective, there are many factors that need to be taken into account when considering coalition-building in African cities. Some of the key factors are as follows.

Governance structures and hierarchies are different in different African countries, both at national and local (city and sub-city) levels. This needs to be taken into account when planning urban coalitions in African cities – or between them – in order to ensure that coalitions target policy and implementation at

the right levels of governance. Coalitions also need to be governed by a set of principles that ensure their integrity as public bodies. This may include, for example, ensuring; (1) transparency with respect to funding, expenditure and conflicts of interest, (2) ensuring diverse cross-sector and multi-institutional stakeholder participation, and (3) facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration.

Generally, state funding for coalitions is important – they become less effective and lose political impact when funding from the state is inadequate<sup>20</sup>. In Africa, where central and local government budgets are stretched, the availability of state funding for urban coalitions will likely not be adequate. Other funding options should be explored alongside state funding. Moreover, where the state may be seen to impose an agenda that an urban coalition has been constituted to oppose, funding is unlikely to be made available from the state.

It is important to note the importance of power relations in maintaining cohesion in coalitions<sup>21</sup>, whether they are community-based, public-private partnerships, private sector-based or public interest-based. Competition for decision-making power, resources, status and influence can thwart efforts to actualise coalition goals<sup>22</sup>. The role of local champions, who are well networked and can mobilise these networks to gain influence for the coalition is critical<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, the role of local authorities is also important in that they do not have to play the lead role in coalitions, but can play a very effective role as facilitators<sup>24</sup>.

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11. Africa's urban dwellers are expected to grow from 471 million in 2015 to 1.33 billion in 2050 (UN-HABITAT and ECA, 2015). Africa's top 18 cities are expected to reach a combined purchasing power of USD 1.3 Trillion by 2030 (Swilling, 2010).

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