

Background Paper

African Urban Research Initiative

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Introduction

This paper has been prepared as a background to the inaugural meeting of the African Urban Research Initiative, to be co-hosted by the African Centre for Cities (ACC) and Cities Alliance (CA) in Addis Ababa, from 20 to 21 March 2013. The purpose of the meeting, broadly speaking, is to enable the networking of key actors in the urban research and donor fields, and to help formulate a shared strategic vision of how best donors and African scholars can work together to establish a more expansive network of practice-oriented research centres across the continent.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. The first is to guide discussion at the AURI meeting in Addis Ababa by briefly identifying some key historical, thematic and paradigmatic trends pertaining to urban research in Africa, highlighting regional similarities and differences. This is the focus of the first section of the document. Here the paper draws upon a separate literature review conducted by the ACC in 2012 to identify the major themes and trends of 'applied African urban research' published in English since the year 2005. The production of the review was guided by the following questions:

- What are the key themes, trends and issues arising in the recent literature on African cities?
- How do these these themes, trends and issues manifest spatially? (i.e. where are certain research trends emerging, in relation to the spatial distribution of specific urban problems?)

Separate literature reviews with identical parameters were produced by consultants for Francophone and Lusophone African countries.¹ In total, over seven hundred articles and abstracts in English, French and Portuguese were reviewed and categorized thematically as part of the research process. The review of the English literature concentrated exclusively on peer-reviewed journal publications, whilst the other reviews also considered peer-reviewed book chapters and, to some extent, commissioned reports.

Secondly, the paper sketches some trends pertaining to the institutional context for research production and financing, with particular interest in the issues affecting the production of urban research in Africa. This is the focus of the second section of the paper. The main point of reference for this discussion is an ACC-produced desktop survey of applied urban research institutions in Africa, once again conducted for all linguistic regions of the continent. Various reports and papers on the status of the international aid and donor sector were also consulted.

1. A historical perspective on urban research in Africa

Writing towards the end of the 1990s, Richard Stren (1998) argued that to understand contemporary trends in African urban research, and their regional variations, one would need to take account of two patterns. The first was the continuing influence of 'international disciplinary perspectives' and in particular the dominance of the geographical discipline within urban research in Africa. As a reflection of this, during the 1990s a key concern of urban work was 'the spread and management of urban services',

so that the focus of most literature on the topic of 'governance' was on how to increase access to material infrastructures (Stren 1998). Stren (1996) also argued that dominance of geographical urban study was particularly significant in French-speaking countries.

The second set of patterns relates to the ways in which African urban research themes have, over time, been influenced by global trends and paradigm shifts. During the 1960s and the immediate post-independence era, a significant corpus of work began to examine urban issues in Africa. This early work was firmly ensconced within the paradigm of 'modernization', 'stressing the polarity of traditional and modern life' and focusing primarily on issues such as rural-urban migration and integration of rural migrants into 'modern' urban societies (Stren 1998: 2). The 1970s witnessed a general paradigm shift towards 'global economic models' and concepts such as 'underdevelopment' and 'dependency', leading to interest in the structural factors that 'produced and reproduced low-productivity employment in cities of the south' (Stren 1998: 2). At the same time, Africa emerged as the 'crucible' of the concept of the 'informal sector', with the result that much urban research of the 1970s examined informal economic activities in towns and cities, as well as issues in line with the development of 'basic needs' programmes. In this decade, poverty was a general research focus, but the emphasis was on rural poverty rather than its urban manifestations (Stren 1996).

The urban effects of structural adjustment and liberalization policies assumed the focus of researchers in the 1980s - a general concern that was carried through to the 1990s when the focus shifted towards urban local government in relation to decentralization (Stren 1998). Here there was a shift towards understanding 'governance' in line with a widespread interest in the institutions of civil society and their relationship to formal institutions of state and processes of development and democratization. Social policy formulation and its implementation at the regional and local level was another focus, as were the local effects and manifestations of globalization in African cities (Stren 1998).

However, the volume of African urban research output decreased significantly during the 1980s. By the end of the decade, the perception (amongst international donor and research sectors) of the severity of this decline was strong enough to support the launch of the Global Urban Research Initiative (GURI) (Stren 1996). Based at the Centre for Urban and Community Studies at the University of Toronto, and supported by Ford Foundation and later the World Bank, GURI had the general purpose of addressing 'the role of research in urban development', reasserting the value of social science in development and putting attention on the 'function' of urban research in line with the increasing recognition of the critical state of cities in the developing world (Vaa 2003). The outputs of this project revealed a 'general consensus that African cities are in crisis', stemming from 'failing services and inadequate local government structures, shortage of housing and jobs, severe environmental problems, widespread poverty and increasing inequalities' (2003: 109). It was seen that African governments had contributed to this crisis through their failure to provide enabling institutional and legal frameworks for urban development in the context of widespread corruption and informality.

Amongst other issues, the GURI project was able to test the hypothesis that African urban research had been in decline during the 1980s, and found that although this decline was spatially uneven, there had indeed been a drop-off in the quantity of urban research, notably in East Africa. For Stren (1996), this could be attributed to both the onset of economic crisis and the undermining of institutional supports for research as a consequence of economic liberalization. However, in countries such as Nigeria there was a marked increase in research output in this period, largely due to the establishment of numerous new universities and urban and regional planning programmes (Stren 1996).

The GURI project enabled the identification of knowledge gaps and data issues in African urban research (Vaa 2003). Specific gaps included the themes of poverty, inequality and informal economy. The resulting sub-regional agendas for future research drawn up as part of GURI were 'remarkably similar', including especially 'urban poverty, urban management and governance, the urban environment and urban demography' (2003: 111). Land use, shelter and the role of women in urban development were identified as secondary themes.

The breadth and rigorousness of the GURI research process gave Akin Mabogunje the confidence to offer a depiction of the nature of the urban problematique in Africa:

The urban problematique in Africa revolves around the issues of who shapes the city, in what image, by what means and against what resistance. It is a problematique arising from the confrontation on the continent of social processes, some of which derive from the dominant capitalist mode of production whilst others stem from societies still immersed in their own pre-capitalist cultures but in various stages of alienation from them

Mabogunje (1994: 22-23)

At the time of writing, the central 'problem' of African urban research was, in this view, the effects of this 'confrontation' in the production of space, and in particular the reproduction of social, economic and political differences and inequalities, in the context of high levels of complexity associated with the effects of globalizing economic systems.

Overall, although Stren (1998) noted a global resurgence in urban research in the 1990s, he also saw that in Africa this resurgence has been accompanied by patterns of 'localization', involving some degree of 'indigenization of themes and ideas', and a trend towards research being driven by project-oriented donor agendas (1998: 5). The latter point is discussed in greater detail in Section 3. However, before the paper goes on to discuss the prevailing trends affecting the institutional infrastructure for urban research in Africa, the following section identifies some key thematic areas, as well as methodological and paradigmatic trends, in African urban work since 2005.

2. Key Trends in Urban Research in Africa, post-2005

The historical trends identified by Stren (1996) and outlined in the previous section lay a foundation for the discussion of the contemporary African urban literature. This section proceeds to discuss broad regional trends in applied urban research produced in Africa after 2005, highlighting key themes and some broad paradigmatic considerations. The regions discussed are Anglophone West Africa; French West and Central Africa; Southern Africa, and East Africa. Overall, the research process revealed that there is

significant regional and national (and even intra-national) variation in terms of the themes and analytical approaches of contemporary urban research.

In **West Africa**, the English language literature is dominated by that produced by planning and geography departments at Nigerian universities. However, Ghanaian universities also produce a large volume of work, and some departments and academics have achieved remarkably high research output rates in recognized academic journals, especially in the fields of geography and population studies. The key focus of much research in this region is the question of how urban sustainability and health can be ensured in the context of rapid urbanization and widespread poverty in both primary and secondary cities, and attendant processes of 'informalization', waste production and environmental degradation. A high proportion is concerned with solid waste management policy and practice, linking up with environmental health issues. Climate change vulnerability and adaptation (particularly in coastal areas) is an emerging concern, particularly in relation to flooding risks, coastal settlement management, urban agriculture and disease (especially malaria and water-borne pathogenic risks).

Health and demographic issues tends to be the focus of research in countries other than Nigeria and Ghana, however there are particular themes that reflect local developmental preoccupations and concerns: For example, flooding in Dakar is a key theme. In post-conflict societies (Sierra Leone, Rwanda) migration, resolution and coping strategies are of particular interest. A trend in the literature emerging from Lagos is the writing of thought pieces or reflections on the challenges and policy necessities of Lagos as an emerging 'mega-city' with 'world class' aspirations in a globalizing economy, but facing severe challenges to environmental sustainability. Nigerian urban literature (whilst dominated by work produced at the interface of planning, environmental health and waste management, as well as informal economic dynamics) is also distinctive to the extent that urban challenges and necessary responses are often articulated in light of rural development efforts, with the main interest being the deceleration or reversal of urban growth and decline. The dynamics of urban poverty and intersections with informal practices (including waste recycling and agriculture) are also important foci. Here themes and narratives of rapid urban growth bringing about environmental and social decay and disorder are common (responses to such issues are usually envisaged as the better enforcement of town planning regulations). Issues relating to development in the context of what could broadly be termed 'developmental patrimonialism' associated with extractive mineral economies also attract some attention. Other popular topics include participatory planning, infrastructure development and management, urban transportation, land and housing, the cultural and demographic characteristics of the urban youth, small-scale entrepreneurship (especially the role of women) and climate change vulnerability.

As the site of radical neoliberal experiments and decentralization, a prominent seam of Ghanaian research concerns the experiences of privatization, for example in water and sanitation service provision, as responsibilities for providing services have passed from central government to local authorities, leading local governments to seek new arrangements for financing and delivering such services. But again, the themes of environmental management, urban agriculture and solid waste management predominate, often looking at the relationship between environmental risks, service

provision and poor urban communities. University-based departments in geography and population studies also produce a wide variety of urban-related work on issues including urban segregation, migration, informal economic activities and the spatial dynamics of poverty and health.

The French language literature regarding **West and Central African** cities² and urbanization shares certain concerns with its English counterpart, but also has some points of difference. These differences relate to the thematic areas of research, and especially the mode of research output. Some reflect historical differences between French and English-speaking contexts in terms of legislative, professional and disciplinary traditions. An aspect of this historical difference is the traditional French academic concern with *Aménagement du territoire* ('territorial management'), which approximates the Anglophone practice of 'spatial planning', whereby towns and cities are often viewed in relation to their wider regional context rather than examined at an urban scale (research may look, for example, at the ongoing 'blurring' of urban/rural relations, processes and effects of peri-urbanization, or problems of 'balanced territorial development' between city and country, large and medium-sized cities). This theme is particularly strongly developed in West African countries such as Bénin and Sénégal. Otherwise, many of the urban themes addressed by research in this region are familiar to Anglophone contexts. Most Francophone countries continue to produce work on questions of governance, including descriptions and critiques of decentralization policies and reforms, as well as efforts to promote participatory planning and decision-making (in transportation and environmental management, for example). Research on environmental hazards and environmental management, framed within efforts to promote urban sustainability, provides a strong theme (e.g. RDC, Sénégal and Togo), including issues of solid waste management and informal recycling, interlinking with research on urban ecosystems, agriculture and food security, climate change vulnerability and adaptation (particularly in coastal areas), as well as environmental health and disease.

Given the history of civil displacement and population movements in the region, it is understandable that circulations and migration are a relatively popular research topic. Some of this work is interested in rural-urban population interactions in peri-urban areas. Other authors have studied, for example, how migrants strategize and insert themselves into urban economies. Urban economies also constitute an important theme of research, with a particular focus on markets; illicit and informal economies are not receiving as much attention as one might expect. There is perhaps a lack of work on informal economies (relative to Anglophone research), although an exception is the research undertaken by IAGU on the actors involved in the informal economy of waste recovery and marketing in Dakar (Cissé 2007).

Sectoral research into urban management issues, especially urban services and infrastructure, is certainly produced in the region. This may be framed as the analysis of the delivery of 'public goods' (which may include a range of issues such as safe childbirth, security, markets and water/sanitation). One also finds work examining the experience of 'the street', transportation networks and transformations of urban space, as a way of reflecting on questions of public space management.

In general the output of published sectoral research (including work on services and informal systems of delivery) from French African institutions would appear to be less than in well-resourced Anglophone regions. Leaving aside matters of political-economic stability and resource limitations, this trend also perhaps reflects a tendency for French African university centres to be more concerned with teaching than with research projects, in combination with a bias towards consultancy work when research is undertaken. The issue of consultancy bias, and how the adverse effects on research proper can be managed and avoided, has itself become a topic of research (de Sardan, 2011).

French West and Central African countries continue to add to a significant corpus of less 'applied' yet urban research, particularly in the realm of urban history, where authors are especially interested in the transformation of urban life through pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras. Other urban work analyses street cultures and the interface of popular culture (especially music, literature, cabaret, etc.) and identity formation. Urban cultural studies appears to be a particularly strong tradition in RDC.

A final point that should be made is that there is an increasing amount of work on Francophone countries published in English journals looking at poverty-related topics such as health and disease, urban agriculture, climate change vulnerability and adaptation, energy access amongst the urban poor, as well as waste generation and management, often with an interest in the livelihoods of the actors involved.

Southern African research is dominated by the outputs of South African university departments and centres in much the same way as Nigeria does in Anglophone West Africa. However, Southern African research tends to come from a broad spectrum of disciplines and departments in a more balanced manner, less dominated by health, environment and population studies. A fair proportion takes the form of case studies of particular local projects or initiatives, with a view to identifying their policy-based and theoretical implications. Common regional themes include migration (reflecting the historical significance of agricultural and mineral extraction economies and the associated development of migrant labour systems in the region), planning and governance (dealing with implications of broad political-economic changes such as the increasing role of China in Africa and planning practice in the context of decentralization), land access and tenure security (especially in Botswana, Namibia, Angola, Lesotho) and issues more or less common to all regions, including the promotion of urban sustainability, primarily in terms of environmental management, agriculture and food security (and increasingly linking with the topic of climate change adaptation at the level of local government, especially in South Africa).

In South Africa, questions of the country's post-apartheid urban transformation still dominate the urban research agenda. This work can be seen to generally respond to the question recently posed by Bill Freund (2010): is there such a thing as a post-apartheid city? Therefore a strong theme of work looks at ongoing 'transformations' in the realm of civil and political society, urban socio-spatial relations (including segregation), urban cultural life and identity, and so on. While most research focuses on and is produced in the major cities (Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban), small town development is a lasting concern. Issues of how race and class relate and conflict in space are still

important. But there is also significant output of applied research directed at the substantive nature and governance of issues such as:

Environmental management (including pollution and waste management) and linked concerns with climate change adaptation, energy transformations and food security.

The urban character of **poverty and inequality**, including livelihood and coping strategies in the city.

Migration and health clusters are strong producers of urban work and are often closely related, for example through the relation between migration and HIV/AIDS. This work also links with work on sexuality, informality and questions of belonging amongst new urban migrants.

Research on **urban informalities** includes the nature and governance (i.e. efforts towards 'formalization') of micro-enterprises and the informal sector (especially informal trading, recycling, transport) and informal settlements particularly in light of sanitation (with agriculture in informal settlements as a minor emerging theme).

Urban economic development research links up with that on the informal sector, and is largely concerned with contemporary business transformations, infrastructure financing, as well as the economic impacts of mega-events such as World Cup 2010.

Political transformation and activism: new and distinctive forms of post-apartheid local democracy and state-civil society relations.

Crime, policing and the securitization of space: the relationship between crime, security and the built environment (including the development of gated communities); physical violence and links with substance abuse; new and contested forms of (unbundled and fragmented) security governance in major cities.

Planning and service provision in the context of decentralization, particularly case studies of integrated development planning and attempts to promote strategic spatial planning and participatory governance at the municipal level. Similar kinds of local-level 'case studies with policy relevance' look at climate change adaptation, housing, gender issues, informal settlement management, and land management.

Infrastructure systems: networked infrastructures and sustainability transitions, energy, transportation and ICTs, urban infrastructure financing.

While most of this urban research is conducted at the local urban or municipal level, it is worth noting that in South Africa a sill of work seeks to contribute to urban and spatial policy at the national level, responding to the lack of a concerted national urban policy and issues concerning post-apartheid spatial development strategies (especially with respect to local economic development). It is also notable that there is continued

interest in urban research with a less 'applied' focus, particularly with respect to issues such as heritage and memorialization, sport and the city, religion, xenophobia and identity formation, amongst others.

Urban research on the **Portuguese-speaking countries of Southern Africa** (Mozambique and Angola) tends to be produced by a combination of international research centres (for example, the African Studies Centre of the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa), local university-based centres (CAP at Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, Maputo, as well as locally based consultancies and NGOs. Some of the work produced by the Lisbon-based African Studies Centre is published in English. The work appears to be highly interdisciplinary, often employing some combination of political analysis, development studies, sociology and anthropology. It would thus appear to be less influenced by the discipline of geography than the work in either Franco- or Anglophone countries. As the work is concerned with the question of the 'urban' a central theme is how social relations, exclusion and inequalities manifest and reproduce in space, and how these dynamics have changed over time with the clash between 'modern' forms of social life, with those of a more 'traditional' society.

Urban research in the region, particularly in Mozambique, tends to focus on the various manifestations of urban poverty, highlighting (for example) the relations between poverty and gender, sexual behaviour, informal economic practices, the formation of identities, livelihood and survival strategies, networks of solidarity, as well as the social reproduction strategies that poor urban residents develop to improve their lives. Most of this work has the specific objective of contributing to development policy and poverty reduction practice. Urban management and wider issues of 'governance' and decentralization are also important recent concerns in Mozambique, driven by research funding from UN agencies and USAID, and focusing particularly on efforts by both government and informal residents to promote land tenure security. The issues of land markets and tenure security is also of particular interest in Angola, where Development Workshop (DW) has been involved in multiple research programmes to build municipal participatory planning and land reform capacity.

In **East Africa**, the general output of urban research is shared by countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia (although Kenya and Tanzania appear to produce a greater proportion). Overall, the output appears to be smaller than that of West and Southern Africa, possibly reflecting the continuation of a significant decline in East African urban research during the 1980s, as noted by Stren (1996). Thematically the literature is very diverse, addressing a wide range of issues and reflective of the current interest shown by donors and development agencies. At the regional level, common overall themes include solid waste and water management, linking closely with pollution, environmental management and health concerns. Solid waste management constitutes a significant proportion of the work produced in Uganda and Ethiopia (it is a common theme elsewhere, but not as dominant in the total share of research output as in these countries).

There is a significant urban health research sector in East Africa, and here the focus is primarily on health and demographics. With a particular focus on informal settlements, this work examines the relation between urban health and processes of migration, as

well as issues such as sexual behaviour, often employing the analytical categories of age and gender. In large part, the independent African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) located in Nairobi is responsible for this output (twenty-four articles produced by APHRC-affiliated authors were reviewed as part of this project). Health, as a cross-cutting research theme, extends across all urban sectors including agriculture and its link with disease through water and waste management. However, urban agriculture is primarily interesting for East African researchers as a source of livelihood and food security.

As the crucible of the concept of the 'informal sector' a significant vein of East African work examines modes and governance of informal economies and urban small-scale enterprises (with the uptake and use of ICTs by these enterprises as an interesting sub-theme). Studies of informal land management and settlement practices, in particular their interface with formal systems, are also present. Community-based upgrading and infrastructure development (Tanzania) and community organization through enumeration and savings (Kenya) in informal settlements are also emphasized. As with the other regions discussed in this paper, planning and spatial governance issues occupy a fair amount of attention in all East African countries: the primary question being how to respond to the 'urban challenge' in the context of the decentralization of governance structures, the shift towards strategic urban development planning, the privatization of urban service provision, and the increasing need for civil society participation in development. In terms of secondary research themes, one finds a relatively small but emerging body of work on climate change, including adaptation measures in coastal areas, and efforts to mainstream climate vulnerability issues into planning and spatial governance more generally (as is the case with Uganda). Within the region, Kenya is perhaps distinctive in having an urban literature, albeit less 'applied' in nature, reflecting on urban identity practices and claims along the lines of cultural studies.

Research taking the cities of **sub-Saharan Africa** or Africa collectively as the unit of analysis appears for a wide variety of themes. Leaving aside the emerging body of work on 'African urbanism', applied research at this scale may study, for example, the dynamics and interrelations of certain urban phenomena (for example, migration, HIV prevalence and food security). It may also take the form of practical reviews or position papers, arguing the need for new research agendas or a broader conceptualization of a particular issue. However, it would appear that few institutions regularly produce published urban-related research at this scale.³

Summary

Urban research in sub-Saharan Africa shows some regional variations in themes and publication routes, but there are nevertheless broad points of commonality. Making any generalizations about this diverse body of work – emanating from many different disciplines, development challenges, funding sources and strategic intentions – is very difficult. At risk of over-simplification and blindness to specificities of context, the following 'network' of overlapping and intersecting research themes and keywords is emerging:

- Urban spatial development, governance and planning: decentralization; participatory planning; building local government capacity; strategic spatial planning; privatization of urban service delivery; spatial development in the context of developmental patrimonialism; participatory planning; housing policy and delivery; national urban and spatial policy; urban infrastructure financing
- Urban economies: transformations in business and entrepreneurship, especially in the informal sector; property markets; urban infrastructure and economic development
- Land markets, land access and land tenure: the interrelation of formal and informal delivery channels; links with planning and economic development topics; regularization of informal settlements; and efforts to promote tenure security for the urban poor
- Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector: pollution; landfill management; solid waste management; water management; informal recycling and collection; informal service delivery; linking with urban agriculture and health
- Health sector: disease and physical health in informal settlements, and the relation between health and a range of demographic and urban issues, especially migration, agriculture and environmental management
- Climate change: socio-environmental vulnerability and resilience especially in coastal areas; linking closely with agriculture and food security, to a lesser extent with energy and land tenure; climate change adaptation, often at a municipal level
- Conflict and physical security: population displacement and refugees; public safety and policing; securitization of urban space

Amongst these thematic clusters, a major growth area of the past decade is clearly that of climate change and its linkages with disasters and other issues. Furthermore, a number of common issues provide the contextual backdrop to discussions across a range of urban topics, and can be best described as ‘cross-cutting’ themes. These include environmental sustainability, informality, migration and religion. All of these issues constitute something of the African ‘urban challenge’, which in its various forms and responses is the primary ongoing concern with urban African research.

In terms of regional differences, of course themes and capacities differ between national and linguistic contexts. Cities have different needs, institutions have different traditions, and these are factors that bear upon how research is produced. The discussion above reflected upon some of these contextual differences. For example, the inflection of the concept of ‘the urban’ (within wider concepts of ‘territory’) in French work may be slightly different to that in other linguistic regions, and a high proportion tends to appear in book volumes relative to journals. Migration is a lasting concern in societies that bear the marks of colonial era migrant labour systems. Land access and tenure security is a concern both in countries with strong freehold ownership systems (where poor people cannot afford to live legally in the city) and for socialist land ownership contexts currently undergoing rapid urban growth and development.

It is also worth noting those thematic areas that appear to be underdeveloped in the contemporary literature. One area that stands out is that of urban economies and

economic development. While a fair amount of literature does generally address the issue of the changing role of cities in a globalizing economy, there is a relative lack of work examining, for example, the precise ways in which municipal urban strategies and investment practices may produce capital that can be fed back into local socio-economic development, or how urban economies are changing in their regional networked relationships.⁴

Publication Types and Output

An interesting finding of the research process was the existence of regional differences in publication routes. A high proportion of English language research on cities and urbanization appears in academic journals. Portuguese work appears in a combination of books published in Portugal, international English journals, commissioned reports and university journals published locally (in Mozambique). Work written in French tends to appear in edited book volumes, and only a small number of French journals (relative to those in English) publish work on specifically urban matters. With this work there is a much stronger emphasis on monographs and edited collections on particular cities and on cross cutting themes, than might be the case in the Anglophone African situation. Two book publishers predominate: l'Harmattan and Karthala. Taken together, their output of research on urban Africa and issues which intersect with urban themes could total as many as a hundred volumes over the past decade. Most of these volumes are authored or edited by scholars based in France and Belgium, but they do carry a significant number of chapters penned by researchers based in Africa, and on some occasions are a vehicle for African researchers to coordinate, edit and publish results themselves. A recent example of this point would be Aloko-N'Guessan et al. (2010). One reason for why book publishing continues to eclipse journal publishing perhaps lies in the subsidies available for such projects through French embassies and other international agencies.

Methodological and paradigmatic trends

Historically, the main mode of African urban research output has been the localized case study, and the vast majority of postgraduate social science theses at African universities have taken and continue to take the form of case studies. The case study appears to continue to dominate the published work of most contexts, often with the purpose to contribute to policy development and urban practice rather than theoretical development. In terms of disciplinary location, urban geography and, to a slightly lesser extent urban planning and public health, dominate African urban research output (largely a continuation of the trend identified by Stren, 1996). However, it is certainly the case that a significant proportion of published African urban research is produced by multi-disciplinary (and often international) research platforms, often combining elements of social and natural scientific analysis.

While the total output is certainly increasing, comparative urban analysis appears to remain an underdeveloped field. There is however some comparative research on aspects and dynamics of individual cities located within particular sub-regions, and on the intersections of diverse urban practices and processes at the sub-regional level (e.g. links between migration, HIV/AIDS and urban food security in Southern and Eastern

Africa). There is a small contingent of work comparing various practices in African cities and nations with those of international contexts. This work examines issues and themes ranging from social movement organizations in Peru and South Africa, to integrated water management in Maputo and Hermanus, and to climate change adaptation strategies in South African and Ethiopia. However, fairly often these studies are not comparative so much as multi-case studies, where the comparison is methodologically implicit, and the description of cases becomes a matter of contrast rather than systematic comparison (which would allow the development of theory).

Although comparative urban work is relatively underdeveloped at present, it is without doubt a current area of growth and elaboration. There appears to be general interest from donor and development agencies in comparative research networks and methodologies in the urban research sector. In part, the increasing interest in comparative research can be seen as a corrective to the history of localized individual case studies that have provided the bulk of work on African urban issues. Comparative research may further increase the reliability of the research data, as well as its value for decision-makers, as it tends to focus on how various combinations of forces may produce and constrain different outcomes in different contexts. In other words, if carefully designed methodologically, comparative case-based research (more so than synoptic case studies) provides a systematic lens on the complexity of urbanization, revealing the multitude of variables and contexts affecting urban development processes, while testing the efficacy of the strategic responses available.

In terms of broader paradigmatic shifts, over a decade ago Stren (1998) identified the emergence of a multidimensional notion of 'urban security' as a key trend in African urban research. If in the early 1990s the focus of development agencies and the scholarly community was on governance reform (related to decentralization and the empowerment of civil society) by the turn of the century 'urban researchers were increasingly focusing on questions of personal security and on the reform of urban institutions in order to reconstitute citizenship and to overcome severe fragmentation and the threat of crime' (Stren 1998: 18). Certainly an driver of this trend was the more general shift in emphasis from 'state security' to 'human security' in international development discourse, involving 'the broadening of the unit of analysis of security from the state to individuals and groups of people within states' (Mbadlanyana et al. 2011: 70). More recently, the interest in African urban security entails various forms of vulnerability or risk analysis and reduction. It is a paradigm that connects themes ranging from physical security and conflict resolution, to economics, to climate change, to health, social capital and informality. Its rise to prominence within the urban field is perhaps best represented by the increasing number of key urban terms that contain the qualifier 'security' (food, tenure, economic, livelihood, environmental, etc.).

If a broad objective of African urban research is to promote 'security' across a systematic range of issues, then the means to do so is described by the concept of 'resilience'. Resilience has its origins in complexity thinking and complex adaptive system theory, and the view that systems are inherently non-linear in nature. Resilience itself denotes the capacity of a system to return to a previous state, to 'bounce back'. Promoting resilience depends in large part upon the practice of large-scale comparative vulnerability and risk analysis - a practice for which large of amounts of data are

required, through the careful monitoring of physical systems. The increasing interest in urban resilience research is represented by the recent establishment of large-scale projects such as Climate Change and Urban Vulnerability in Africa (CLUVA) and the African Urban Risk Analysis Network (AURAN). AURAN, for example, seeks to promote analysis of a wide variety of urban risks on the continent, particularly those affecting informal settlements, as well as efforts to integrate risk monitoring and reduction measures into urban planning practice and local community-based environmental management.

To some extent the concern with security takes on a particular character in the African context. Intensity of change or 'rupture' is a meta-theme that connects urban work in all regions (e.g. EAMAU 2008). African urban work often has, in one way or another, the theme of how to confront urban challenges in the wake of profound transformations. These transformations may be from pre-colonial to colonial and post-colonial periods, or from centralized to decentralized planning and development regimes through structural adjustment, or those performed through violence and civil war. The focus is often on rapid and intense changes in the character, identities and modalities of urban political, economic and cultural life, in the types of actors and actions involved in urban governance and in the nature of power over city-shaping processes. Some of these ruptures take on a very human character, associated with civil conflict, displacement, extreme violence, economic crisis, poverty and their subjective manifestations. Others are associated more with major institutional reforms, unmatched by capacity, leading to policy-implementation gaps and intensified urban fragmentation. With these forms of urban 'insecurity' compounding and aggravating one another, efforts to promote urban resilience become of central importance.

A final point regarding contemporary paradigmatic shifts relates to the changing view of African urbanization as something more than a 'crisis'. The literature shows evidence of a continuing shift towards seeing African urban areas as the sites of creativity, innovation and wealth-generation rather than simply rapid growth and socio-moral decay. This is, of course, part of a wider shift in policy and academic discourse on a global scale. After decades of reactions to a perceived 'urban bias' in African national development policies, and a concomitant focus on issues of rural poverty rather than urban poverty, most governments and development agencies see urbanization as a phenomenon that is related positively to socio-economic development on a national scale, and worthy of dedicated research and strategic intervention. This realisation is reflected in the recent international interest in the development of coherent urbanization policies at the national government level, as reflected by position papers by development agencies (e.g. Kessides 2005) as well as the recent proceedings and discussions at the 2012 World Urban Forum in Napoli, Italy. That being said, this paradigm shift is by no means unfolding evenly across the continent, and a number of recent African academic studies and 'thought pieces' still see rural development as a primary emphasis of development policy, and as a means of halting rural-urban migration.

With these thematic, methodological and paradigmatic trends in mind, the following section goes on to discuss the changing institutional context for urban research on African cities and urbanization. The intention is to relate the trends outlined above with

ongoing changes in the institutional location and funding of academic and public policy research.

3. The evolving 'institutional infrastructure' for urban research

The findings of the literature review indicated that contemporary research concerning urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa (produced on the continent) emanates from a wide variety of institutional types and arrangements. Furthermore, significant sites of research production do exist on the continent. But the institutional landscape for African urban research is geographically uneven, and temporally unstable. In the past many such institutions have appeared to produce impressive work, only to recede or cease to function as unstable institutional, economic or political factors affect their funding and operation, or as key members of staff move.

Whilst most urban research appears to be produced by disciplinary departments (especially departments of geography and planning) or (less often) multidisciplinary centres located in universities, a significant proportion is produced by local or international non-governmental research institutions. Outside of countries with relatively large economies and well-established university systems, a sizeable proportion of the published work is the outcome of international research projects driven by Northern research partners. Publications are often the result of collaborative writing projects involving one or two Africans amongst a team of foreign authors. An element of this trend is no doubt the fact that partnerships and exchange agreements between African and international universities often result in co-written publications (e.g. University of Western Ontario and some Ghanaian universities). Otherwise, one finds combinations of local government agencies and/or NGOs producing published work with international academics. This is a relatively common trend in urban health research. In terms of such writing partnerships within Africa, there is evidence of some collaboration across Anglophone, Lusophone and Francophone barriers, although this is relatively rare.

African institutions involved in the regular production of work on urban development issues can be broadly distinguished between several types. On one hand, there are research centres in the form of dedicated and officially recognized departments or other structures that operate within the university faculty environment, based at a single location. Many such centres have existed at African universities for multiple decades, with strong publishing track records. However, very seldom do they have an explicit urban focus. More often they are concerned with settlement (including rural settlement) and development issues more broadly, as with the Institute for Human Settlement Research (IHSR) at Kwame Nkrumah University of Technology (KNUST) in Ghana, and the Institute for Human Settlement Studies (IHSS) at Ardhi University in Tanzania (formerly known as UCLAS). Others take the form of socio-economic development research institutes, or applied interdisciplinary research hubs for the social sciences, which may work on urbanization as a particular research theme or project amongst other rural, regional and sectoral topics. An example of the latter type is the Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS) at the University of Zimbabwe. An alternative situation is that particular departments (most often geography departments) develop reputations

and traditions of urban research, but this is not necessarily packaged or marketed in the institutional format of an applied research centre.

As mentioned, university-based centres with an outright focus on applied urban research are rare. However, new centres dedicated to urban research are starting to emerge. In 2008 the African Centre for Cities was created at the University of Cape Town (South Africa) in direct response to the 'urban challenge' facing sub-Saharan Africa. The last half-decade has also seen the establishment of other dedicated urban research centres and networks at African universities, including the Lagos Urban Research Network (LURNet) at the University of Lagos (Nigeria), and the Centre for Urban Research and Innovations (CURI) at University of Nairobi (Kenya).

Another broad institutional category includes institutions of teaching and training, specializing in spatial development issues, but also with a research function, based on operations at single or multiple campuses, offices or chapters. Examples include the Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS) in Ghana, the Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction and City Development (EiABC), as well as Ecole Africaine des Métiers de l'Architecture et de l'Urbanisme (EAMAU) in Francophone West and Central Africa.

Academic research networks are another important category of institution. Research networks may be based in the North but include African partners, such as the Climate Change and Urban Vulnerability in Africa (CLUVA) programme, the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC)⁵ as well as various international public health research networks. Alternatively they can be based in African institutions, but are often driven by foreign funding. Examples include the Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS) and African Urban Risk Analysis Network (AURAN)⁶. The Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) and more so the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) also produce published research on urban issues.

It is worthwhile reflecting on the recent importance attached to research networks as vehicles for the production of applied, high-quality research. Stren (1998), reflecting on the experiences of the Global Urban Research Initiative (GURI) of the early 1990s, argued several key benefits of urban research networks: 'Not only can local researchers monitor their local case studies over time with rigor and integrity, but their findings – when placed in a comparative framework, and when policy-makers, NGO activists, and project "operators" are involved – can be an important springboard to new policy ideas and project innovations' (1998: 18). The comparative and decentred, multi-actor nature of the research network is thus seen as an important means of developing the quality, innovativeness and development applicability of research.

Non-university institutions involved in applied urban research, including NGOs based at a single location, African branches of international NGOs, 'think tanks' and foreign research institutions, are also common and many have been operating for decades. Again, the issue of the lack of an outright urban focus pertains. Many NGOs and think tanks oriented towards policy development exist, usually performing a combination of research, policy advocacy and capacity building functions of some kind, but are often

interested in urbanization within broader questions of development and transformation with little interest in published peer-reviewed research. Examples of those with an indirect focus on urbanization issues include:

- African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET) based in Accra
- African Institute for Capacity Development (AICAD) in Juja (Kenya)
- African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) in Nairobi (Kenya)
- African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) in Nairobi (Kenya)
- African Public Policy Research Centre (APPRC) based in Toronto (Canada)
- *Centre d'Etudes, de Documentation et de Recherche économiques et sociales* (CEDRES) in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)
- Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) in Kampala (Uganda)
- Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI)
- Pan-African Institute For Development (IPAID) based in Douala (Cameroun)

That being said, some research NGOs produce significant amounts of published urban work of high quality. The African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) in Nairobi (Kenya), for example, has a prolific published research output in English-language journals. The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) office for West Africa, located in Accra, has also published consistently over the past decade. In French-speaking countries, *Environnement et Développement Tiers Monde* (ENDA-TM) in Dakar, and particular the *Relais pour le Développement Urbain Participé* (RUP) programme, stands out for similar reasons. Foreign research institutes, including bilateral organizations such as the Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique (IFRA) located in Nairobi, also continue long traditions of producing high-quality urban work.

Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa appears to host the greatest number of research centres working on urban issues, although more often than not these will not have an explicit 'urban focus' – they may be dedicated to research on specific sectoral issues such as housing and settlement, population changes, health or agriculture. They tend to be highly applied in their focus, specializing in generating knowledge for policy development especially in areas such as environmental management, local governance, housing and planning. Similar findings pertain to Francophone sub-Saharan Africa, where few research centres have an explicit urban focus – usually their remit is 'development' more generally – and this is compounded by a general sense (stemming from French disciplinary traditions) that cities are not necessarily a fundamental focus for research endeavour. Furthermore, research centres everywhere face profound challenges in terms of institutional sustainability due to the lack of consistent financial support for long-term programmes, and the related tendency to undertake consultancy work – issues that are the focus of the following section.

Financing African urban research

A key trend affecting all regions of the continent is the prevalence of research consultancy as a dominant mode of research production (see Vaa 2003; de Sardan 2010). This contrasts sharply with the first two decades of post-independence, when resources for the conduction of urban research in Africa came 'primarily from national governments', such that research was predominantly produced in 'universities and

public research institutes' (Vaa 2003: 111). But African institutions of higher education faced many severe challenges during the 1980s and 1990s, and there was a general decline in research capacity and output (see Sawyer 2004). A decade ago Vaa (2003) suggested that, outside South Africa, research consultancies are 'probably the most important mode of financing urban studies'. Here research projects tend to take the form of 'individual studies commissioned by donor agencies, which need research-based information as background to their various activities, and for planning, implementing and evaluating programmes and projects' (Vaa 2003: 112). But why has this trend affected the field so vigorously? According to Mabogunje (1994), the reason can be traced to the historical gap between urban researchers and government policy-making and implementation, which tends to compound the lack of comprehensive government urban development policies. The resulting 'knowledge vacuum' was filled by the well-prepared research agendas and programmes of foreign donors.

The effects of consultancies on the general project of research have been widely documented (see Stren 1996). These relate primarily to constraints of time, the effects on the modalities of research project development, on long-term capacity and knowledge needs, and on the quality of research output. On one hand, consultancy-driven research contributes to 'the pulverisation of research ideas' and research communities (Vaa 2003: 112; Stren 1996). Research questions tend to be devised by the financing agency and presented to the research consultant, rather than being produced through an iterative process of engaging with theory and local developmental issues. Similarly, the selection of research topics is often done by financing agency and is thus driven by their institutional agendas rather than 'an assessment of local knowledge needs' (Vaa 2003: 113). Consultancy also drives researchers to compete for contracts which tends 'to undermine the perception and practice of research as a collective enterprise' (*ibid.*).

In terms of time constraints, commissioned studies are rarely long-term programmes where it is possible to build up the longitudinal sets of data required for establishing the necessary knowledge base about current urban processes (Vaa 2003). They tend to be short-term projects, with a consultant's report required to fulfill contractual requirements. This in turn undermines long-term capacity-building needs, due to the fact that consultancy-based work is rarely published or used for training purposes. It is 'more often subsumed in larger project documents written by expatriate teams of consultants' (Vaa 2003: 112). The result is 'bulky and elusive "grey" literature', running the risk that it will be 'forgotten by the agencies that commission them even before they are finished' (Vaa 2003: 113). A final point is that consultancy-driven research may have serious implications for the quality of research produced. Few quality controls are put in place by funders to ensure that high quality is produced. Furthermore, limited dissemination means the work does not typically receive professional quality assessment. Vaa (2003) therefore calls for funding agencies to be more reflective in their commissioning processes – allowing time for prior discussions involving all stakeholders on the basic objectives of the research, providing feedback on commissioned studies, and engaging with mechanisms of professional research quality control.

Issues and trends in the donor funding of urban research

This section seeks to discuss issues and trends relating to the availability and provision of donor funding for urban research generally, but with a particular emphasis on the African context. The discussion focuses on donor agencies and providers of development aid, and their financial and management relations to applied urban research departments and NGOs. Key points include the fact that the present-day donor landscape is complex and evolving, and although urban research funding from traditional foreign sources is currently curtailing, there are nevertheless emerging opportunities for African-based researchers.

On a global level, and in relation to donor funding in general (i.e. not limited to research or urban issues), the total number of donors is increasing whilst total allocations of ODA (Official Development Assistance) funding is decreasing. Furthermore, the geography of international aid continues to change. The global recession and recent instigation of fiscal austerity measures have tended to decrease ODA budgets amongst the main international aid providers (Pratt 2009) and regional multilateral bodies like the African Development Bank.⁷ Official development assistance to 'middle-income' countries such as South Africa is rapidly diminishing.⁸ The expected time lapse between the onset of recession and resulting decrease in aid flows means that this trend will likely continue in the short to medium-term. However, at the same time, countries that are not traditional sources of major international finance are increasingly contributing to ODA, including the BRICS countries (often focused on infrastructure investment) as well as nations such as Turkey and Mexico. In addition, private philanthropic sources of funding are becoming increasingly important, with some of these based in Africa and interested primarily in African capacity and development issues, as with the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (Pratt et al. 2012).

It is worth noting some of the key factors affecting the current international aid architecture, as a way of gaining a sense of why and how aid flows are changing. One set of factors relates to the principles of 'aid effectiveness' adopted in recent years by Northern providers of development assistance. The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness laid out five principles to guide lending practice: ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results, and mutual accountability. Essentially the Paris Declaration emphasizes that developing contexts should have 'ownership' over the strategies, objectives and delivery systems of research and development programmes, and that donors should align or 'harmonize' their efforts behind those of the local and national context. This emphasis has been accompanied by a shift towards the provision of 'budget support' for recipient governments, rather than direct funding of projects through international NGOs (this has raised some concerns over the limited role ascribed to civil society in the process – see SAT 2007). Despite a prevailing reluctance to fund the core costs of international development NGOs, some donors continue to provide direct funding to Southern institutions, often through embassies or official development agencies (APRODEV 2010) (this, in turn, has led to concerns that such practices may be generating unhealthy competition between local and international NGOs).

The emphasis on local 'ownership' of donor-funded research and development programmes was carried through to the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action, which further ramified the need for inclusive partnerships, and on the delivery of results, or the idea that aid should be focused on real and measurable developmental impacts. This emphasis has tended to reduce the geographic and thematic scope of aid by focusing on a few priority countries (placing emerging middle-income countries at risk of being cut from donor programmes) and sectors that can produce quick demonstrable results (APRODEV 2010). As a corollary, providers of ODA are generally becoming more stringent in their conditions of funding, and monitoring and evaluation capacity is becoming increasingly important as a function of research institutions – as is the need to have this evaluation tagged against a defined 'theory of change' in order to demonstrate impacts.

Recently these trends have led to concerns that organizations' capacities to establish and maintain long-term partnerships or research projects in a 'process-oriented' manner, or to be innovative and risk-taking, are being compromised. Yet there is also a trend towards granting some flexibility in implementation through 'framework agreements' with Northern NGOs. These agreements are generally highly programmatic and results-based, but may involve co-funding arrangements (i.e. the Northern NGO may then delegate core funding to locally-based NGOs). Such trends have unfolded within a donor field increasingly viewing service delivery as the domain of local authorities and civil society. Successful funding proposals thus tend to require a link to advocacy and rights-based approaches, or a specific added-value (e.g. reaching specific groups, launching a specific innovative approach).

Donor approaches to research capacity building and urban research

A report produced by ODI (Jones et al. 2007) notes that a number of important intermediary organizations (providers of research capacity building services) are funded by various donor consortia. These include organizations such as the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and the Association of African Universities (AAU). The report also identifies several important differences between 'clusters of donors' in supporting research capacity development. In terms of urban-related research, providers of ODA have different priorities and functions, whether it is providing financial instruments for urban infrastructures (e.g. AFD) or promoting urban development documentation (SKAT) (COMSATS 2007). Some agencies may have a specific focus on the urban sector (e.g. Swedish development agencies), or may work on poverty issues with relevance for urban issues (DFID).

Bilateral donors tend to invest in individual training (particularly postgraduate programmes and PhD study) through scholarships, or in institutional support to universities as well as the facilitation of partnerships and networks (Jones et al. 2007): 7). A number of bilateral agencies support partnerships between Northern and Southern universities, and have done so for many years. Some invest in project-oriented programmes (with a learning-by-doing approach) whereas others such as Sida/SAREC are not discipline- or theme-based, but seek to strengthen higher education institutions

and management capacity as a whole. Several support theme-based research networks on, for example, health and agriculture, as is the case with Danida (Jones et al. 2007). However, with some exceptions, bilaterals appear to invest more in capacity building work that focuses on health and agriculture, natural and physical sciences and economics.

Generally speaking, bilateral agencies have significantly curtailed the funding of slum upgrading and housing programmes (possibly for the reasons mentioned above regarding the pressure for demonstrable short-term results from aid allocations, but also for a range of other issues relating to risk assessment and management - for example, local political, land titling arrangements are contextual factors that affect the results of urban programmes). In terms of funding for the housing sector, total allocations rose substantially as a component of ODA from bilaterals in the late 1990s, but this dropped sharply post-2000 (just as housing increased as a proportion of ODA from multilaterals) (Shea 2008). To some extent the relative lack of demand for slum upgrading programmes from developing countries themselves has driven this drop-off, pointing to the need for concerted advocacy efforts to raise this agenda amongst African governments (Shea 2008).

Multilateral donors, on the other hand, tend to focus less on individual-level funding or on universities, and instead provide institutional support to independent research organizations and networks. Multilaterals continue to invest heavily in supporting thematic-focused networks largely concerned with health, agriculture, the natural sciences, natural resource management and the environment (Jones et al. 2007: 7). Many continue to provide funding for slum upgrading and housing programmes (Shea 2008). Here it is important to recognize a concerted move towards urban development issues within the agendas of multilateral organizations such as the World Bank post-2000. A key World Bank working paper entitled 'The Urban Transition in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction' (Kessides 2005), issued a plea for the development community, including policy-makers and donors, to 'move beyond debates that either criticize the process of urban growth in the Region or apologize for it' (Kessides 2005: xxii). The document framed cities as central elements of national development, emphasizing the importance of and need for national urban policies on the continent. It took the view that sustainable development is not possible simply through investment in urban infrastructure, or less complex institutional practices associated with community-driven development, for example, but is 'inseparable from local government capacity-building' (Kessides 2005: xxi). Aid investment should not occur through *ad hoc* assistance but should be part-and-parcel of municipal budgets and expenditure plans.

Kessides (2005) also identified several key priorities for urban research in Africa. The first relates to the need to collect more city-level data through household surveys, and to use existing data in better ways to explore the 'multiple dimensions of urban poverty'. The second priority involves conducting more comparative research to refine understanding of local poverty needs and possible responses, differentiated between primary and secondary urban areas. A third entails a focus on the financial resources available to municipal governments and the difference between the revenues actually collected by municipal governments versus those that could potentially be secured.

The focus of **private foundations** to date has been on supporting sector-specific multi-donor research networks (such as AAU and CODESRIA), and to some extent on individual-level support through the provision of research fellowships (Jones et al. 2007: 7). Key contemporary themes for private donors include agriculture, health (including population and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS), education, environment and economic development. The Ford Foundation perhaps stands out from this group as its thematic foci in Africa are less traditional, including issues and themes relating to asset building and community development, peace and social justice, knowledge, creativity and freedom. Along with Ford, the Rockefeller and Gates Foundations have historically shown an interest in urban research programmes. More recently, some of these urban programmes have had their budgets cut to be scaled-down and strategically reoriented within other thematic programmes, or have been closed down altogether. This reduction in funding for urban research has to be understood in the context of the post-2008 recession and the fact that funds have been cut across all themes and programmes for most private donors. In order to manage their risks, donors are forming consortia and often investing their aid in strategically selected projects, capable of demonstrating short-term results, rather than long-term thematic research programmes.

Despite the trend towards short-term project-oriented funding, private donors continue to show some interest in capacity-building programmes to strengthen local African research institutions to deal with developmental issues. An example of such a programme is the Wellcome Trust's African Institutions Initiative, launched in 2009, which aims to strengthen local research capacity and develop scientific leadership for the region by linking various regional consortia and networks.⁹ Another example is the recent donor interest in think tanks,¹⁰ including the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) operated by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC). In 2009, IDRC, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and Bell and Melinda Gates Foundation committed \$90 million to twenty-four think tanks in East and West Africa. Here the need to develop endogenous funding streams remains a recognized imperative for even the most successful institutions. In 2011, the TTI held three workshops on resource mobilization strategy development for its African grantees in Dakar, Accra, and Nairobi. These had the goal of strengthening 'the capacity of grantee organizations to successfully mobilize resources and sustain their operation over the long-term'.¹¹ There is little doubt these are also issues that bear heavily on the operation and sustainability of university-based and NGO research centres and networks.

What general statements can be made about the status of urban research themes amongst donor organizations? There is some evidence of a reduction in funding allocation to dedicated urban programmes by donor agencies. Yet 'urbanization' remains a key theme of interest, especially in relation to climate change and the WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) sector. Here Africa is of particular concern as 'the most rapidly urbanizing region in the world' and one where 'poverty rates in urban areas are increasing' (Shea 2009). Total funding for the international WASH sector has grown steadily since 2001, a trend reflected in the published literature where over the past decade there has been significant output of work on water and solid waste management topics, particular in West and East Africa but also in Southern African countries (OECD

2010). Furthermore, a continuing sense of the importance of urban or city-regional analysis and intervention in confronting the challenges of economic development, climate change and local environmental health suggests that a sectoral interest in urban matters will most likely remain within the donor field. In addition, it is likely that other urban-related research clusters will emerge and consolidate over the following decade. For example, a cluster that is barely recognized in the recent literature concerns the articulation and implementation of 'smart cities' concepts and agendas in the African context. As a theme closely linked to private corporate interests in providing network-based urban monitoring, management and security solutions to municipal governments, it is highly likely that funding support (linked to companies such as IBM, Siemens and Cisco) for research in this field will continue to grow in the near future.

Sectors of reduced interest amongst donors include the agricultural sector (although recently there have been calls to take agricultural issues seriously again due to prevailing food security issues). Other themes vulnerable to funding cuts include public mobilization, development education and awareness-raising projects, to the extent that it is often difficult to produce measurable outcomes within a relatively short timeframe – this factor also affects a range of other concerns such as democratization, addressing inequalities and promoting social cohesion, civil society building, and so on (APRODEV 2010).

These various thematic must also be related to a prevailing change in the ways that international institutions devise modes of funding and operate capacity-building programmes for research. It is widely acknowledged that systems of knowledge production are changing rapidly in line with the pace of socio-technological developments. Conventional academic postgraduate training is simply not sufficient to generate a 'critical mass' of researchers and useful knowledge on a particular issue. Increasingly the need for universities to strengthen links to industry and government policy systems is emphasized. And if universities do not respond adequately, they face heady competition from private institutions that are well positioned to do so, including think tanks and NGOs.

4. Conclusion

This paper set out to accomplish two tasks. The first was to briefly identifying some key historical, thematic and paradigmatic trends pertaining to urban research in Africa, highlighting regional similarities and differences. The second was to sketch some trends pertaining to the institutional context for the production and financing of research generally, and specifically of urban research in Africa.

The discussion of contemporary African urban research indicated that Anglophone and Francophone institutions have strong disciplinary roots in geography, but increasingly urban research is being conducted by multi-disciplinary research platforms that may or may not be university-based. Lusophone literature, on the other hand, tends to lean towards an eclectic mix of development studies, sociology and policy analysis. Substantive themes of urban analysis are highly diverse, and any sort of generalization is difficult. However it is clear that issues of decentralization and participation, water and waste management, climate change and disaster management, urban poverty and

livelihoods, demographic and public health are key foci, often framed within the broad objective of 'urban sustainability' and cross-cutting issues such as informality, migration and religion. Economic development issues perhaps remain an underdeveloped area of urban research.

In terms of paradigmatic trends, a multidimensional concept of 'urban security' has been a key theme of research since the 1990s, unfolding in line with a general shift from state to human security in international development discourse. In its more recent incarnations, urban security analysis includes a broad family of concepts and practices relating to systemic risk, resilience and vulnerability. It is applied to themes ranging from climate change and disaster risk management, to violence and measures to ensure physical security, to definitions of livelihoods security and social capital, to health security, land management and tenure security. To some extent the urban security agenda has subsumed a longstanding concern with change and 'rupture' in African urban life and the governance of African cities. Other key trends include an increasing interest in comparative analysis between cities both within Africa and elsewhere internationally, as well as ongoing efforts to reconceptualize African cities as the sites of innovation and possibility, rather than of crisis and despairing fatalism.

The paper has argued that institutional landscape for African urban research is geographically uneven, and temporally unstable. In all regions, urban researchers have themselves expressed concerns with the effects of donors-funded consultancy as a primary mode of production on institutional sustainability, as well as the quality of published research output. The donor landscape for the funding of urban research is also complex and evolving. Recent years have seen a general reduction of international donor funding for research and other functions, in line with budget cuts across most themes related to the post-2008 global recession. Official development assistance to institutions located in middle-income countries or emerging economies is rapidly diminishing. Increasingly, aid agencies see that development assistance should be based on and respond to local objectives and needs, promoting mutual accountability through local participation and ownership. Here a key concern for the donor community is 'harmonization' of their aid allocation practices. In terms of research capacity development, bilateral, multilateral and private donors have different thematic and institutional priorities, however many have and continue to allocate support towards research networks, often with comparative research and capacity-building objectives.

In general, the funding models attached to international research finance are becoming more restrictive and results-oriented, which may detract from research institutions' efforts to establish long-term research foci and partnerships (APRODEV 2010). This raises serious questions of how research programmes can develop endogenous funding models to be financially sustainable in the medium- to long-term. One aspect of this challenge is the need to research institutions to develop monitoring and evaluation capacity as a means of demonstrating research impacts. Indeed, it is increasingly difficult for NGOs or university-based research centres to access funding for large-scale research programmes, especially for sectors where quantitative results are not demonstrable. All types of research centres face significant challenges in securing funding in a competitive global market of research financing.

Whilst it appears that available funding for urban research from traditional sources (bilateral agencies, private foundations) is likely to decrease, alternative private sources of research funding may be becoming available. These sources include philanthropic donors based in Africa, and corporate sources linked to emerging 'smart cities' agendas, for example. But, generally speaking, a continuing sense of the importance of urban or city-regional analysis and intervention in confronting major global challenges such as climate change, local problems such as sanitation and public health, and in promoting national economic development, suggests that a sectoral interest in urban matters will most likely remain amongst most governments and development agencies of all types.

Based on the foregoing, it is clear that there is significant potential for the establishment of regional comparative research networks dedicated to building local capacity for applied urban research. However, any such initiative will face profound challenges with respect to financial sustainability, as well as in the development of appropriate methodologies and conceptual frameworks to encompass the wide range of highly contextualized development issues and themes that currently provide the bulk of published urban research on the continent.

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¹ Prof Alan Mabin of the University of the Witwatersrand was the consultant responsible for the production of annotated bibliographies and institutional surveys for Francophone African countries; Sandra Roque and Carmeliza Rosario of AustralCOWI in Mozambique produced the same for Lusophone African contexts. Thanks and due acknowledgement for their input to this paper are respectfully given, as are apologies if their particular thoughts and ideas have been

² The key reference for this section is the essay commissioned by the ACC and produced by Prof Alan Mabin, entitled 'Prospects for urban research in Africa, by Africans: francophone perspectives'. Most of the thoughts and ideas on Francophone African urban research presented in this discussion are those of Prof Mabin.

³ But there are certainly examples: Centre for Research in Environmental, Coastal and Hydrological Engineering (CRECHE) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa produces work on greenhouse and carbon emissions at an African scale.

⁴ An exceptional institution here is the Centre for Regional and Urban Innovation and Statistical Exploration (CRUISE) located at the University of Stellenbosch, which produces high quality research on urban economic issues and networks, at the regional scale.

⁵ The CPRC is an international partnership of universities, research institutes and NGOs established that provides research and policy guidance on the reduction of chronic poverty. Funded by DFID, CPRC was created in 2000. It produces a high volume of various working papers, policy briefs, journal articles, books and other resources. African partners include PLAAS at the University of the Western Cape; the Development Research and Training (DRT) and Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) in Uganda; CEDRES at the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso; the Department of Economics at the University of Ghana; l'Institut Fondamental

d’Afrique Noire at Université Cheik Anta Diop in Sénégal; and the National Institute of Statistics at University Abdou Moumouni in Niger. See <http://www.chronicpoverty.org/>

⁶ AURAN was formed in 2004 by six African research institutions, with support from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and ProVention. Phase 1 supported six Africa-based partners to undertake applied research on patterns of urban risk – particularly in informal and poor urban settlements. The research initiatives, located in Ghana, Senegal, Algeria, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa, profiled a diversity of emerging urban risks in Africa, including seismic vulnerability, road traffic accidents, significant environmental health and urban flood risks as well as informal dwelling fires. Phase 2 projects were developed (to run until the end of 2009), including:

- In Ghana, the University of Ghana focused on the Korle Lagoon Complex in Accra, aiming to build a community-based environmental management and disaster risk monitoring information system to promote environmental health and ecological restoration of low-income communities.

- In Tanzania, Ardhi University focused on the Msasani Bonde la Mpunga informal settlement in Dar es Salaam, where the project tried to integrate Disaster Risk Reduction with urban planning practice.

- In Mali and Niger, the Dakar-based NGO ENDA-RUP supported expanding urban risk reduction partnerships to minimize the impact of increasing climate stress. Efforts were also directed at strengthening governance capacity with respect to urban vulnerability reduction to priority natural threats. See <http://www.riskreductionafrica.org/en/rra-ddr-auran/rra-auran-about>

⁷ <http://allafrica.com/stories/201301220107.html>, date accessed 21 February 2013.

⁸ http://www.regency.org/news_may11_3.html, date accessed 21 February 2013.

⁹ <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/news/2009/features/wtx055738.htm>, date accessed 22 February 2013.

¹⁰ ‘Think tanks are non-partisan, not for profit organizations and are primarily interested in research and analysis on policy issues... What set[s] them apart from other organizations is that they do not engage in public demonstrations and, unlike NGOs and interest groups, their task is not to aggregate and articulate popular interests’ (Mbadlanyana et al. 2011: 67).

¹¹ IDRC Think Tank Initiative press release, 8 December 2011, ‘Highlight: African think tanks focus on mobilizing resources, development strategies’, http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Programs/Social_and_Economic_Policy/Think_Tank_Initiative/Pages/EventDetails.aspx?EventID=143, date accessed 27 August 2012.