

Proposal for the Ford Foundation

**Project Title: Fostering a Comparative Research Agenda in African
Cities - Urban Spatial Inequality and the New Urban Agenda**

Submitted by:
African Centre for Cities –University of Cape Town

Revised version for online publication

February 2017



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

1) Proposal Narrative

- *What is the problem?*

Urbanization is radically shifting the development trajectory of the African continent. Currently the world's 100 fastest urbanizing areas are in Africa, and, uniquely, some cities are growing at 5% per annum, faster than in any other region globally (UN- Habitat 2014). By 2035 it is estimated that 50% of the continent's population will be classified as urban (UN-Habitat 2010; World Bank 2013). To put this in context, Africa's urban growth rate is more than 10 times that of Europe's. Importantly, this does not mean solely the expansion of megacities. The high growth stems from a dynamic combination of natural population increase and rural-urban migration. since fertility rates remain high in both categories of settlements (OECD/AfDB/UNDP 2016). UN-Habitat estimates that 62% of the urban population within the Africa region are living in secondary cities (UN- Habitat 2016). This fact, coupled with an overwhelmingly young population which radically diverges from the ageing of populations in other regions of the globe, requires new ways of assessing and understanding the dynamics at work in African cities (UN- Habitat 2016).

In October 2016, the global community converged for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, also known as Habitat III, to come to agreement on a New Urban Agenda and revive global commitment to sustainable urbanization. Building on past agreements and taking into account the recent approval of the *2030 Agenda*, Habitat III reflects a new level of policy understanding and hopefully commitment to define and implement local, national and regional programmes to address unjust patterns of urbanization and establish pathways towards sustainable urbanism. In light of the anti-urban sentiment of most African governments in the post-colonial era, this represents a vital change in attitude that must be capitalized on.

Scholarship and research on urban conditions and changing trends in African cities form a critical link in developing contextually appropriate and locally specific responses to urban challenges. African cities in their current form are physically expanding because of growth of settlements on the peripheries, spatial expansion due to reclassification of rural areas, and economic as well conflict driven migration. This growth in and of itself does not occur in a vacuum. This expansion is taking place in an environment where, due to limited investment and poor planning, urban centres already offer insufficient access to decent shelter and associated basic services, nor are residents able to support their livelihood needs and endure largely without any form of social protection.¹ While cities are potential engines for growth, without an adequate understanding of the national urban ecosystem and local conditions, opportunities to harness growth for sustainable development will be missed.

Recognising that while scholarship on African cities and their forms has increased in the last decade, there remains limited capacity on the continent to analyse and propose

innovative responses to challenges associated with urbanization. Some of the existing and under-recognised capacity exists in durable knowledge institutions such as the universities and applied urban research centres which constitute the AURI network. Applying its robust and interdisciplinary skills, and leveraging its geographic reach, AURI aims to undertake research that frames the contemporary urban challenges through a context specific and regionally situated lens. In doing so, AURI members and its affiliates will contribute to building a vibrant, rigorous and comparative body of research and analysis that aims to enhance policy formulation on the ground.

If the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and linked policy declarations (SDGs and Paris Agreement) are to have transformative impacts on the ways in which African cities are governed, managed and developed, then it is imperative that networks such as AURI are empowered to fulfill a vital intermediary role. AURI is uniquely positioned to engage a broad spectrum of urban stakeholders in order to address gaps in knowledge that can foster more effective co-production of contextually relevant solutions to intractable problems. Furthermore, AURI can play a vital role in documenting the contemporary strategies for managing urban growth with an eye on improving conceptualization and impact through critical analysis and sustained engagement. The challenges that have beset the continent must be tackled by urban practitioners, officials, scholars and policy makers by working collaboratively and co-producing new urban knowledge. AURI offers an interdisciplinary and geographically diverse platform to drive and support this far reaching and essential work.

- *How do we address the problem?*

At this moment after the adoption of the New Urban Agenda that is based on a vision for cities which emphasizes quality of life, inclusivity, and equity over exclusive focus on the built environment and related services, we must reflect on: **How can African knowledge institutions support and monitor the newly agreed global commitments to sustainable, resilient and inclusive cities? In what ways can we build on the momentum emanating from the Habitat III consultative work which has spanned three years, manifested in the Abuja Declaration, which foregrounds African commitments to effective urban management?**

The African Centre for Cities (ACC) at the University of Cape Town was established in 2007 to contribute to the production of new knowledge on African cities. The work of the ACC has been to carry out and support applied urban research on the continent and to critically disseminate that knowledge in accessible academic and popular formats. In doing so, ACC has sought to promote critical urban research and policy debates and ensure that quality African scholarship is endorsed.

In order to operationalize its mandate, the ACC undertakes research and collaborative enquiry at the city, the sub-national (regional), the national and the continental scale. The work of AURI is carried out at the continental scale, but is rooted in the realities of the specific cities where our members are based. This scale of research critically offers the advantage of innovative approaches to applied research and the opportunity for regionally comparative work on urban development that has been largely absent. AURI is thus uniquely positioned to undertake innovative comparative work that can enrich urban scholarship while also providing vital support to urban public policy processes

that have to contend with numerous complexities associated with sustainable urbanization amidst large scale economic exclusion, poverty and environmental precariousness.

Significantly, in addition to rapid growth in urbanization, the continent is soon poised to benefit from its demographic dividend. According to the US Census Bureau, more than 60% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa and almost 50% of the population in North Africa are under the age of 25. These youth are not just located in rural areas, they are migrating to, and being born in, urban areas. These two catalytic factors, the unprecedented growth of urban areas and the large cohort of young people who will determine the future of the continent, together present a provocation for using research to engage under-represented voices in the urban development dialogue and create space for new ways of addressing urban development challenges.

The proposed grant activities and deliverables are designed to augment the resources available to policy makers and government officials charged with managing Africa's urban transition. In this regard, the AURI network seeks to respond to the gaps between research, policy and practice experienced in many African cities. It is envisioned that the contribution of the AURI network will be to facilitate a new way of conceptualizing programme responses to the continent's urban challenges based on local priorities. In responding to the regional diversity inherent in a network such as AURI, the proposed approach requires integration of new ways of collaborating with solid research methodologies and an emphasis on innovation. AURI's multidisciplinary network of skills and expertise, seeks to specifically explore and elaborate on the ways that the New Urban Agenda can be operationalized in the African context.

2. Objectives of this Proposal

The aim of this project is to support the growth of an interdisciplinary and continental urban research network, the African Urban Research Initiative (AURI), and its engagement in a programme of comparative and innovative research aligned to the New Urban Agenda and the Common Position of African governments adopted in the run up to Habitat III. The purpose of AURI is to develop and strengthen a multidisciplinary network of scholars and practitioners based at African knowledge institutions committed to building a body of knowledge on urban development and management on the continent. This network aims to publish and disseminate research which speaks to the urban development agenda in African cities and serve as a resource to policy makers. In working towards these goals, AURI seeks to carry out the following objectives:

- a)* Develop and publish a new and critical body of comparative urban research that interrogates the theme of spatial inequality in African cities.
- b)* Co-produce new urban research on the experience of youth in growing urban centres on the continent. This will include the use of a variety of platforms to engage in both academic and popular research with youth and other marginalized segments of the population in African cities in order to better document the views of the silent majority.
- c)* Support the formulation of urban observatories / city labs in under researched African cities.
- d)* Organise and execute an AURI Policy Conference at the end of January 2018 in Cape Town, South Africa to present and disseminate new research, offer opportunities for peer

learning and feed into the publication of an edited book, policy briefs and/or academic journal articles.

AURI will continue to build on existing networks which operate through and are connected to the ACC such as the Future Resilience of African Cities and Lands (FRACTAL), Consuming Urban Poverty (CUP), the Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS), Heterogeneous Infrastructure of Cities of Uganda Project: Thinking With the South (HICCUP), Urban Africa Risk Knowledge (Urban ARK) and the emerging Centre for Urban Law and Finance in Africa (CULFA).

3. Proposed Grant Activities

In recognition that African cities are fast growing and dynamic organisms that require research as a means to stimulate engagement on key policy issues, the proposed AURI work programme will encourage innovative approaches to knowledge coproduction and comparative research. Based on the research theme '*Spatial Inequality in African Cities: Research and Practice*', AURI members will be supported to conduct the following modes of urban research:

New and critical comparative urban research

This includes research by one or more AURI members based on knowledge co-production methodologies, close collaboration with research partners in civil society to refine broad research themes to reflect local realities, participation in data collection and the preparation of research for publication.

Urban observatories

An urban observatory seeks to compile georeferenced urban data and map and analyse these data using GIS techniques in order to offer an alternative means of understanding urban challenges within a specific city.

City labs

A city lab is a forum that facilitates the co-production of policy-relevant knowledge to reduce urban poverty, through the engagement of researchers, government officials (city, regional or national), practitioners, community members, civil society and other urban stakeholders around a number of themes. This would typically involve seminars/meetings of a range of stakeholders on a monthly basis to get different perspectives on particular topics from a range of viewpoints.

Each city lab hosted by an AURI member will require a coordinator and will develop an annual work plan which will create opportunities for engagement between researchers, practitioners, city officials and civil society. Partnership with local and regional officials is encouraged and the proposal must include demonstration of commitment to the city lab by key urban stakeholders. Activities may include public seminars, small research proposals and preparation of materials (electronic or print) on the research completed during the city lab. At the end of the grant period, each city lab team will coproduce a paper on the main outcomes of each city lab and these will be submitted for publication by AURI.

In addition, AURI members will be invited to identify innovative and alternative strategies

which specifically incorporate design to address urban challenges. Using the urban observatory as a vehicle, AURI members will develop an interdisciplinary team to select an issue for action research, complete data collection and develop speculative designs where needed. The call for applications will be limited to AURI members but will require the participation of urban stakeholders with an emphasis on policy makers and civil society organisations representing youth and the urban poor. Additional support for the design work will be offered by the University of Cape Town's new School for Design Thinking. All work must be completed in 12 months and will contribute to a repository of urban innovations made available to the research community using digital channels.

All of the activities undertaken as part of the urban observatory and city lab programme are aimed at not only generating new knowledge but critically interpreting research and making it accessible for government and its partners.

Activities of all three modes of research should be planned in accordance with the following estimated time frame:

Activities	Estimated time frame
1. Call for proposals	end of March 2017
2. Selection of proposals for funding	end of April 2017
3. Data collection / lab meetings / seminars / analysis	May – December 2017
4. AURI policy conference	end of January 2018
5. Prepare for publication	February-April 2018
6. Peer-review	May-June 2018
Expected outputs	- Chapters for edited book - Policy Briefs - Journal articles

Criteria for selection

The AURI network has committed to a programme of urban research focused on five pillars which are based on the research theme '*Spatial Inequality in African Cities: Research and Practice*'. The pillars of this research theme include:

- a. Governance and service delivery: the role of urban governance and local government in addressing service delivery challenges
- b. Informality: understanding the nature and dynamics of informality beyond the formal-informal dichotomy
- c. Youth: the role of the youth as the majority of urban residents
- d. Urban security: understanding, and responding to, structural violence, crime, political conflict
- e. Migration: the dynamics and implications of cross-border and internal migration, and the issue of refugees

Within this framework, cross cutting issues that can be explored include spatial inequality and open data.

A maximum total of **10 grants** will be awarded, up to a maximum value of **USD10,000** each (the grants will also be up to USD10,000 **per member organisation** for multi-city comparative research proposals). Proposals must be a **maximum of 10 pages** inclusive of a **narrative and a detailed budget**. Proposals will be subject to a rigorous and competitive selection process.

Eligibility Criteria

1. The project implementing agency must be an AURI member (or more than one AURI member for comparative multi-city research projects);
2. The project is technically sound in conception and presentation, and must draw on existing experiences of knowledge co-production, city labs, urban observatories and comparative research in the global South where necessary;
3. The timeline required for the implementation of the project must be compatible with the AURI 2016-2018 work programme and funding cycle.

Eligible Activities

1. Field trips
2. Professional fees linked to research outputs such as data collection
3. City lab meetings organized and hosted by the recipient research centre

Ineligible Activities

Ongoing expenses for the running of the city labs beyond the AURI 2016-2018 work programme cannot be covered by this grant.

Evaluation Process

All proposals will be due four weeks after the call for proposals is released. The ACC as host of the AURI secretariat will review all applications and rank them. The director of the ACC, the AURI secretariat and the AURI scientific committee will be engaged to make a final selection.

4. AURI Policy Conference

Towards the end of the proposed work programme, the AURI secretariat and scientific committee will convene a two day policy conference. This conference is scheduled to take place on 30 and 31 January 2018 in Cape Town, South Africa. The purpose of the conference will be to present new research and findings produced over the life of this grant. The conference will also include a closed working session with AURI members to develop and discuss the work plan for the next three years.