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## PD4: mitigating conflict and violence in Africa's rapidly growing cities

### Review

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# **Migration and Global Environmental Change**

## **PD4: Mitigating conflict and violence in Africa's rapidly growing cities**

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# Abstract

Over the past 50 years, the urban population of sub-Saharan Africa has expanded at a historically unprecedented rate. Although there is little evidence that urbanisation increases the likelihood of conflict or violence in a country, Africa's urban transition has occurred in a context of economic stagnation and poor governance, producing conditions conducive to social unrest and violence. In order to improve urban security in the years ahead the underlying risk factors must be addressed, including urban poverty, inequality and fragile political institutions. This, in turn, requires improving urban governance in the region, including strengthening the capacity of local government institutions, addressing the complex political dynamics that impede effective urban planning and management, and cultivating integrated development strategies that involve cooperation between various tiers and spheres of government and civil society.

## Introduction

Over the past 50 years, the urban population of sub-Saharan Africa has expanded at a historically unprecedented rate due to rapid population growth and rural–urban migration. Although the process of urbanisation is generally positively associated with human development, it is also associated with social strain. The characteristics that render urban settlements dynamic socioeconomic spaces (i.e. demographic size, habitation density and social diversity) are also widely perceived to be conducive to social disorder and violence (Rodgers, 2010). While there is little evidence that urbanisation *per se* stimulates conflict or violence the process can be socially disruptive if poorly managed. In Africa, where urbanisation has largely occurred in a context of economic stagnation and political instability, widespread concern about the spectre of social disorder and violence is certainly justified.

Indeed, protests and riots inspired by food and fuel price rises, mismanaged elections and general frustration with corrupt and incompetent governments have become commonplace in the region in recent years. Violent clashes between rival religious and ethnic groups in urban areas are also a source of concern. While such events capture headlines, more prosaic forms of violence also threaten human security and development in the region. Endemic social violence – i.e. murders, assaults, communal violence – has corrosive effects on social cohesion, political legitimacy, economic productivity and investment (Fox and Hoelscher, 2012).

For decades, African governments have responded to the social strains of urbanisation and urban growth primarily with policies designed to discourage rural–urban migration and divert migration away from politically strategic urban centres, such as capital cities (United Nations, 2010). Apart from a handful of extreme cases in which restrictions on mobility were coercively enforced (e.g. apartheid South Africa) these policies have failed to have any discernable impact on urbanisation trends. It is now clear that urbanisation is an inevitable global, historical process stimulated and driven by globalisation (Fay and Opal, 2000; Fox, forthcoming).

Consequently, a significant change of course in policy is in order if human security in urban areas is to be assured in the years ahead. Social unrest, conflict and violence are not inevitable symptoms of Africa's urban transition. Rather, they are associated with material deprivation, vertical and horizontal inequalities and political marginalisation. In urban areas, tackling these issues requires a proactive approach to managing the growth of urban settlements, concerted

efforts to strengthen urban governance systems and policy strategies designed to support and accelerate urban economic development.

## Africa's urban transition

Africa's urban transition is historically unique in two important ways that have implications for the management of conflict and violence in the region. First, urbanisation has traditionally been understood as a by-product of economic development. As labour and capital shift from agricultural production to manufacturing, industry and services, individuals move from rural to urban areas to take advantage of employment opportunities (Lewis, 1954; Harris and Todaro, 1970; Henderson, 2003). However, over the past 40 years, Africa has experienced 'urbanization without growth' (Fay and Opal, 2000). This has contributed to the 'urbanization of poverty' in the region (Ravallion *et al.*, 2007). Second, urban population growth rates (i.e. the rate at which the absolute size of urban populations grow) have been exceptionally high in the region, creating a variety of challenges for governments seeking to manage the growth of urban settlements (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Regional trends in urbanisation, economic growth and population growth, 1960–2005**

	Urban growth rate	Urbanisation rate	GDP growth rate	Population growth rate
East Asia and Pacific	3.66	2.02	5.03	1.64
Latin America and Caribbean	3.10	1.02	1.58	2.08
Middle East and North Africa	3.69	1.13	–	2.56
South Asia	3.35	1.21	2.47	2.14
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.59	1.92	0.59	2.68

Notes: Calculated by authors. Data are from the World Development Indicators online database available at <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>.

The phenomenon of urbanisation without growth has been a source of concern among development scholars and policy makers for decades. Although there is no definitive explanation for the persistence of urban migration in the absence of economic development, it is not entirely a mystery.

For the rural poor, cities have always represented the prospect of socioeconomic mobility (Bairoch, 1988). Even in the absence of immediate opportunity, many choose to take a chance on urban life rather than remain mired in subsistence agriculture. Moreover, rapid population growth in Africa has placed strains on land and natural resources, contributing to the 'push' factors that spur people to migrate – a problem that has been exacerbated by climate change. There is evidence, for example, that increased rainfall variability over the past century has accelerated urban migration in Africa due to its negative impact on agricultural productivity, and hence rural livelihoods (Barrios *et al.*, 2006).

However, even if conditions in rural areas were to improve substantially, it is unlikely that urban migration rates would be significantly affected. Rural poverty may drive people into urban areas in search of opportunity, but so too does agricultural success. As an economy expands and incomes rise, demand for non-agricultural goods and services also rises, thereby stimulating the growth of urban-based industrial and service activities and hence labour migration into urban areas. In other words, urbanisation without economic growth may be possible, but sustained economic growth without urbanisation is not.

In light of this fact, the traditional research and policy focus on rural–urban migration among those concerned with the potentially socially destabilising effects of urbanisation is misplaced. In the absence of repressive measures to restrict mobility, populations will naturally shift from rural to urban habitation in search of opportunity. Moreover, cross-national estimates of the components of overall urban population growth indicate that migration and reclassification account for just 40% while natural increase (i.e. population growth *within* urban areas) accounts for 60% (Montgomery, 2008). In Africa, where net rural–urban migration rates are relatively low and possibly falling (Montgomery *et al.*, 2004; Potts, 2009) the contribution of natural increase to overall urban population growth may well be higher.

Given that the practical challenges of providing housing, infrastructure and jobs to rapidly expanding populations relate to the *absolute size* of those populations, as opposed to their *relative size* vis-à-vis rural populations, policy makers seeking to ease demographic pressure in urban areas should focus less on mobility and more on the pace of overall population growth, which contributes both to rural–urban migration and urban natural increase (Preston, 1979; Montgomery *et al.*, 2004; Dyson, 2010).

## Socioeconomic and political determinants of conflict and violence

There is very little evidence that the process of urbanisation, or rapid urban population growth, is associated with an elevated risk of conflict or violence in Africa or elsewhere. However, it is difficult to make definitive statements about trends because of a dearth of systematic comparative research on the topic. Nevertheless, there is a broader literature on the determinants of conflict and violence that point to particular risk factors.

Before reviewing this literature, it is necessary to clarify the concepts of 'conflict' and 'violence'. Conflict is endemic to human societies. The values, visions and material interests of individuals and groups within any given society are bound to conflict at times and this is not inherently problematic. By contrast, unregulated violence, defined as the use of physical force to cause injury, damage or death, is a fundamental obstacle to human development. Violence destroys human lives, economic assets, social capital and, perhaps most importantly, hope for a better

future. Human development depends upon investing in the future, whether it is in education, infrastructure or productive assets. Where violence is endemic and the future perennially uncertain, investment – and hence development – is inevitably retarded (Bates, 2001).

Violence manifests in many ways. It can be associated with large-scale conflicts between organised groups (e.g. civil wars), episodes of social unrest (e.g. riots), social phenomena such as gangs and generalised criminality (e.g. murder or assault). Consequently, it is very difficult to identify definitive causes of violence across space and time. Nevertheless, the literature points to a common set of motivations as to why individuals engage in violent acts including real and/or perceived uncertainty, insecurity and injustice (Barnett and Adger, 2007), as well as a common set of socioeconomic and political risk factors associated with an increased likelihood that violence will occur in one or more of its various manifestations.

In cross-country quantitative studies the most consistent determinant of outbreaks of violent conflict are poverty and political–institutional arrangements (Goldstone *et al.*, 2000). Chronic poverty is a significant source of uncertainty and insecurity. Faced with material deprivation, the potential individual benefits of engaging in organised violence, such as gaining access to basic resources and the prospect of accumulating assets, may well outweigh the individual costs in terms of the prospect of injury or death (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). Conversely, organised armed groups often use coercive recruitment tactics to maintain and build force numbers, preying on poor individuals and communities lacking sufficient resources to defend themselves.

There is also a strong correlation between the likelihood of violent conflict in a country and the political–institutional characteristics of that country. Alongside poverty, ‘political regime type’ is one of the best predictors of future outbreaks of violent conflict in a country (Hegre *et al.*, 2001; Gates *et al.*, 2006; Goldstone *et al.*, 2010). In particular, ‘weak’ autocracies and ‘weak’ democracies – i.e. countries where checks on executive authority are weak and political participation is selective – are uniquely prone to political instability and violence. According to Goldstone *et al.* (2010), ‘it is where regimes are paralyzed or undermined by elite divisions and state-elite conflicts that revolutionary wars can be sustained and states lose out to insurgencies’ (p. 191).

There is some research suggesting that inequality and ethnic diversity are also associated with conflict risk, but the evidence is less robust. Some studies have found a positive association between inequality and conflict (Muller and Seligson, 1987; Alesina and Perotti, 1996) whereas others find no relationship (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). The same is true of ethnic diversity and conflict (see Hegre and Sambanis, 2006; Laitin, 2007). However, when socioeconomic inequality falls along racial or ethnic lines, creating ‘horizontal inequality’ between groups – and hence a perception of injustice – the likelihood of violent inter-communal conflict may increase (Stewart, 2010). In urban areas, such inter-communal conflicts can escalate into a violent cycle of predation and retribution that results in socially, politically and spatially ‘divided cities’ – a phenomenon closely associated with periods of political transition (Bollens, 2007).

While violent conflicts have commanded the bulk of attention among development scholars concerned with human security in recent years, there is a growing recognition that social violence (i.e. acts of violence that are not directly associated with organised armed conflicts) represents an equally pernicious obstacle to development. Indeed, globally, homicides outnumber deaths due to violent conflict by a factor of roughly three to one and appear to be increasing in number as organised armed conflicts decline (Fox and Hoelscher, 2012). And, as

Table 2 demonstrates, on average African countries suffer from the highest rates of homicide in the world.

**Table 2: Deaths due to intentional injury per 100,000 (average of 2002 and 2004 estimates)**

	Obs	Mean	SD	Min	Max
North America and Western Europe	19	1.4	1.17	0.22	5.67
Middle East and North Africa	19	2.84	2.28	0.73	10.78
South Asia	7	6.63	3.73	3.62	14.23
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	28	6.77	6.59	1.33	31.3
East Asia and Pacific	20	7.77	7.09	0.58	21.09
Latin America and Caribbean	23	18.24	17.11	3.34	77.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	44	19.28	10.01	2.64	55.56
World	160	10.87	11.54	0.22	77.50

Notes: Data from WHO (2004, 2008). Country-level estimates of deaths due to intentional injury exclude those classified as war-related or self-inflicted and are derived from reports of medical professionals.

Evidence on the determinants of homicide is found primarily in criminological studies and closely parallels the findings of the conflict literature. Poverty, inequality and racial/ethnic diversity have all been shown to be positively and significantly correlated with homicide rates in cross-sectional and time-series studies (Fajnzylber *et al.*, 2002; Pratt and Cullen, 2005; Pridemore, 2008; Cole and Gramajo, 2009). There is also some evidence that political institutional factors affect homicide rates. LaFree and Tseloni (2006) present evidence that countries experiencing democratic transitions are uniquely prone to high homicide rates, and a recent cross-sectional study indicates a close correlation between political regime type and homicide rates similar to that found in the conflict literature (Fox and Hoelscher, 2012). Although more research on the mechanisms that link political institutions to social violence is needed, it is likely that economic and political competition in a context of weak judicial institutions encourages the use of violence as tactic for achieving ends.

In sum, the various manifestations of violence appear to share common risk factors. With high levels of material deprivation, deep vertical and horizontal inequalities and fragile political institutions – conditions that engender real and perceived uncertainty, injustice and insecurity – it is unsurprising that Africa is one of the most violent regions in the world. Moreover, given that



the persistent expansion of Africa's urban population has not been accompanied by a commensurate expansion of economic opportunities or political consolidation, the risk of rising urban violence in the region is significant. In other words, the process of urbanisation is a neutral phenomenon, but it may contribute to a transformation in the geography and intensity of violence if underlying socioeconomic and political risk factors are not adequately addressed.

## Urban governance and urban security: challenges and opportunities

Alleviating the conditions that engender uncertainty, insecurity and injustice in African cities depends upon effective and proactive urban governance. A well-governed city is one in which the rule of law is maintained, critical public goods are equitably and efficiently provided, economic regulation encourages growth and innovation, and citizens are able to take an active part in public decision-making processes. While formal government institutions play a central role in ensuring such outcomes, urban governance is also shaped by a wide range of non-governmental actors, such as political parties, commercial associations, community-based organisations, charities, religious institutions, and so on (Friedman, 2007). It is also important to recognise that urban governance is influenced by actors and organisations beyond the boundaries of any given settlement. National government policies and institutions, foreign commercial interests and transnational social networks can all have a significant influence on the quality of urban governance. Consequently, there is no universal governance 'template' that can be applied to improve conditions in urban areas. However, it is possible to identify several critical issues that need to be addressed if urban governance in Africa is to be enhanced, including the phenomenon of informality, strengthening the capacity of local governments to fulfil their development mandates, resolving political tensions that inhibit effective urban planning and management and formulating integrated policies that promote urban economic development.

Since the late 1970s, conditions in African towns and cities have stagnated or deteriorated in the face of *laissez-faire* urbanisation (Beall and Fox, 2009). Faced with fiscal crises in the wake of a global recession that began with oil price shocks in the 1970s, African governments were actively encouraged by international actors to 'roll back' the state through the 1980s and 1990s. The effects in urban areas were particularly acute: state employment contracted, investments in housing and infrastructure came to a virtual standstill and industrial enterprises suffered from aggressive liberalisation policies. At the same time, an anti-urban bias in international development discourse emerged resulting in a shift of focus away from urban development and towards rural development (Beall and Fox, 2009). Governments were also encouraged to devolve responsibility for the delivery of key public goods and services to lower tiers of government, which found themselves with growing mandates and shrinking resources. This confluence of forces resulted in the proliferation of informal settlements, declining living standards and a deepening of socioeconomic inequality in urban centres across the region.

In the absence of government efforts to extend the provision of basic goods and services to rapidly expanding urban settlements, a variety of hybrid governance arrangements have emerged to fill the gap. In some cases these alternative arrangements provide functional, socially embedded solutions to social, economic and political organisation at the local level. However, they can also be rooted in predatory socioeconomic and political relationships that undermine state consolidation and development (Beall *et al.*, 2011). A classic example relates to informal land and housing markets that arise when property rights are poorly defined or inefficiently managed. Informal systems arise under such circumstances and the resultant

ambiguity and insecurity of property ownership and occupation can translate into heavy social and economic costs. It is the more vulnerable who find themselves at the mercy of slumlords who lay claim to land and property beyond the judicious oversight of state institutions.

In many cases, formal and informal governance arrangements do not simply operate in parallel. It is common for formal actors (such as politicians, bureaucrats and police personnel) to exploit their positions of authority to extract rents from urban residents. In some cases this is achieved by accepting bribes to overlook violations of bylaws or regulations, many of which are poorly suited to realities on the ground; in other cases formal actors directly profit from poor urban governance by informally providing goods and services (such as water, land, housing and adjudication) that are traditionally the preserve of formal state agencies. As a result, in many places there has been a proliferation of actors with vested interests in maintaining a dysfunctional pluralist status quo, at the expense of consolidating effective political and bureaucratic institutions (Beall *et al.*, 2011).

The issue of policing provides a concrete case in point that relates directly to the challenge of mitigating urban violence. In the absence of effective formal policing in urban areas – a ubiquitous problem in Africa – alternatives have emerged consisting of a ‘kaleidoscope of overlapping policing agencies that are formal and informal, legal and illegal, effective and inept, fair and partisan, restrained and brutal’ (Baker, 2008: 5). There are countless examples of police brutality and bribery, with state police acting with both bias and impunity. In many cases state police are simply absent and households and neighbourhoods rely on community provision or private security—both of which have a long history in Africa dating back to the colonial period. In some cases, these groups operate with state support; some operate without state support or supervision and employ brutal tactics; some are effective but ephemeral; some operate commercially (Baker, 2008). At best, community-based vigilantes or gangs protect their neighbourhoods from hostile groupings without proliferating harm. At worst, militarised police operate as the security arm of political fiefdoms and oppress citizens on the instruction of governments.

For example, in Lusaka, Zambia, the distinction between public and private policing is blurred. Neighbourhood-based security organisations are registered with and acknowledged by the police, with whom they work quite closely (Schärf, 2005). In Tanzania informal security groups known as *sungusungu* have a long pedigree among cattle herders. Customary methods of pursuit, capture and retrieval of livestock by *sungusungu* are appreciated and utilised by the Tanzanian state, which, in 1990, attempted to incorporate them into an integrated policing system (Heald, 2002). In recent years, they have appeared in modified form in a number of Tanzanian urban centres. In Uganda and Kenya, too, the state has tried to incorporate informal security groups into state-recognised people’s militias (Baker, 2008: 92). However, the police often delegate the more distasteful or risky work to vigilante groups and informal militias, making it difficult to subsequently outlaw such groups if they become predatory (Buur, 2002). This was the case with the notorious Bakassi Boys in south-eastern Nigeria, who drove around in police vehicles and provided vigilante-style enforcement as informal security providers, financed by a state governor. Later attempts to legislate against them were futile and they simply re-emerged in another guise (Hills, 2008).

Community policing, which is often portrayed as a constructive response to the failure of formal institutions to provide law and order, can in fact be harsh and sometimes ruthless. Vigilante groups in African cities and towns range from mild neighbourhood-watch-style operations, which patrol settlements to keep them crime free, to those that use violent methods to enforce justice. For example, in Cape Town, South Africa, an organisation known as People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) operates outside the law and often with extreme violence,

engaging in publicly staged punishments and the assassination of drug dealers. The South African state's attempt to incorporate PAGAD into a partnership within the ambit of the law has been unsuccessful because of its own failure to deal with the root causes of public discontent in relation to drug crimes (Kinnes, 2000; Nina, 2000; Schärf and Nina, 2001). However, informal and hybrid policing arrangements are not universally problematic. In Sierra Leone, while unemployed ex-combatants mete out rough justice and their criminal tendencies mean they are treated with caution and fear, in the capital city of Freetown organised youth play a role in providing local security in areas where police are nowhere to be seen (Baker, 2008: 150–154).

As with other aspects of urban governance and service provision, making community policing work in African cities often requires engaging with customary law and leaders. People are reluctant to abandon recourse to customary structures of governance and justice systems, however flawed, unless superior access and services are provided through the formal state system. While chiefs and their courts are associated with, and play a particularly important role in, rural Africa, they are not absent from cities. For example, in Nairobi, Kenya, one study found chiefs to have handled more reports of domestic violence than the police (Coalition on Violence Against Women, 2002), while in Greater Durban customary courts are often the first port of call for a wide range of petty crimes and family and neighbourhood conflicts, making them an indispensable part of dispute resolution (Beall *et al.*, 2004). However, customary leaders and chiefs are invariably reluctant to be drawn into hybrid institutional arrangements such as multi-choice policing, preferring to retain autonomy within their own jurisdictions.

While there is an obvious need to improve policing in African cities, urban security is also a function of urban planning and management. For example, the layout of streets, street lighting, the maintenance of infrastructure and public space, and the nature of transport systems can all impact on the opportunity for and incidence (and perceived risk) of violence (Jacobs, 1961; Little, 1994; Beall and Todes, 2004). Good urban design and planning are therefore critical in mitigating conflict and violence. Physical planning can also be used as a tool for healing divided societies in the wake of conflict. Barcelona, Spain, is one of the most well-known examples of how urban planning can serve such a purpose. After the death of Franco, planners worked to ensure an equitable distribution of urban goods and services through processes of collective urban planning and the aggregation of small-scale, project-based interventions, which complemented the more abstract and broader-scale plans of architects and urban professionals (Bollens, 2007: 35–89).

A more recent example can be found in Bogotá, Colombia, where the planning interventions of two successive mayors transformed Colombia's capital city from a place beset by violence and insecurity to a place of relative peace, a transition achieved through public taxation at the city level and the funding of a rapid bus transport system, neighbourhood resource centres and a public education campaign (Gutiérrez-Sanín *et al.*, 2009). In post-apartheid South Africa, the construction of the Mandela Bridge in Johannesburg and the regeneration of the central city served to link the regenerated central city area with its entertainment centres, exhibition halls and restaurants to residential neighbourhoods to its north, serving to revitalise a run-down part of the city in danger of becoming ghettoised and at the same time break down racialised social barriers (Mlangeni, 2008).

While these interventions offer encouraging evidence that local governments can use creative urban planning and management practices to reduce the prospect of urban violence, their success was predicated on a degree of fiscal and technical capacity that is notoriously absent in urban local governments outside of South Africa. They were also implemented in a favourable political context – one in which the interests of actors at both the national and local

levels were positively aligned. This is a rarity in Africa. Across the region, local (urban) governments and national governments are often at odds. In Kampala, for example, the city government is paralysed by a combination of corruption, conflict with the national government and contentious negotiations with the powerful Buganda community, which controls significant tracks of land in the city (Goodfellow, 2010). Other cities in the region suffer from similar webs of political conflict that impede effective urban planning, investment and management.

It is possible, however, for such political obstacles to be overcome if they are recognised and confronted and adequate resources are made available. A good example can be found in the case of the metropolitan municipality of eThekweni (or Greater Durban), where a creative approach to urban governance helped overcome the legacy of a violent political transition in the city and its surrounds during the period leading up to South Africa's first non-racial elections. The political violence was between largely urban-based supporters of the African National Congress (ANC) and those of the regionally strong and ethnically mobilised Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), and left 20,000 dead and a million people displaced (Beall *et al.*, 2004). The *amakhosi* – or customary leaders – were active on the side of the IFP and, following the ANC victory, they were regarded with suspicion. Nevertheless, in 2003 the relatively well resourced and effectively run eThekweni Metropolitan Council: recognising that chieftaincy had continued salience among many, they made a bold move to involve the hereditary chiefs who fell within the Council's boundaries in municipal affairs. Although there are limits to their participation, they have a significant role and are critical development partners in their areas. This hybrid solution to post-conflict urban governance was made possible by the recognition of multiple sites of authority in the city (Beall and Ngonyama, 2009). The outcome has been an improvement in local security and a contribution to national stability by defusing a regional flashpoint and by demonstrating that chieftaincy, which is hereditary, patriarchal and ultimately non-democratic, can be effectively contained within the parameters of a democratic constitution.

A combination of political will and investment of resources also played an important role in the transformation of Kigali following the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Between 1991 and 2001 the population of Kigali trebled despite the death of around 1 million Rwandans in the conflict. Many returning refugees headed for the comparative anonymity of Kigali, contributing to an urban population growth rate in Rwanda of 18% – a rate virtually unprecedented anywhere in the world in the last 60 years (UNPD, 2009). In a poor country with scant infrastructure, limited state capacity and a torn social fabric, the challenges of urban development in Kigali were enormous. Yet the city was quickly transformed into one characterised by orderly urbanisation and in 2008 was awarded a UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour for innovations in building a model modern city.

The Rwandan Government has poured money into the country's capital city, although the process of urban planning has been much less consultative and inclusive than in Durban. In 2006, by the stroke of a legislative pen, the City of Kigali was made an arm of the central state and the mayor was given strong powers to implement the central government-backed Master Plan. With officials all loyal to the ruling party and with ample resources available thanks to generous foreign donors, there were few obstacles to implementing the government's vision for the capital city, which was to attract investment and reduce the country's dependence on aid, making Kigali the 'Singapore of Africa' through its 'reinvention' as a hub for secure investment in the region. This was predicated in turn on keeping the city safe and orderly (Goodfellow and Smith, 2011). The Government of Rwanda's approach to post-conflict urban planning has been controversial and not without human cost. It has served to transform Kigali from a city scarred by devastating violence and upheaval on a massive scale into one characterised by orderly development, although the nature of this transition may lay the seeds of future conflict.

The cases of Durban and Kigali provide contrasting urban governance approaches to overcoming legacies of violence and dealing with institutional multiplicity. In the case of Rwanda, an autocratic approach involving the suppression or displacement of urban associations not controlled by the state 'is clearly linked to security imperatives and the political dimensions of the government's agenda' (Goodfellow and Smith, 2011). In Durban, hybrid arrangements were negotiated that incorporated customary authority systems into formal structures of governance. In both of these cases, as with Barcelona and Bogotá, a combination of powerful political incentives to establish public order and adequate resourcing were critical in fomenting change.

The extent to which such changes result in a sustained reduction in violence will ultimately depend upon the ability of national and city governments to build a dynamic urban economic base. Improving livelihoods and reducing gross socioeconomic inequality can only be achieved if stable employment and enterprise opportunities are substantially expanded in urban areas. There is no easy solution to this problem. Urban economies are shaped by a wide range of actors and policies. For example, successful attempts to cultivate dynamic 'clusters', such as the information technology industry in Bangalore, India, hinge on effective partnerships between commercial interests, local and national governments, education institutions and civil society organisations (Porter, 2000). Urban planning, infrastructure investment, labour legislation, innovation policies, industry subsidies, macroeconomic policy and trade policy all have important influences on local economic development. Since the 1970s, 'industrial strategy', which was a pillar of development policy and practice in the 1950s and 1960s, was actively discouraged in favour of unfettered market forces (Beall and Fox, 2009). However, after almost 30 years of economic stagnation in Africa, there is now a renewed interest in how public policy can be used to stimulate the kind of structural economic change that is required to generate sustainable employment opportunities in urban areas (Lin, 2010; Lin and Monga, 2010).

## Conclusions and policy recommendations

The extraordinary growth of Africa's urban population in recent decades, coupled with economic stagnation and weak political institutions, is generating strains that increase the risk of urban violence across the region. Past efforts to stem the demographic tide with mobility restrictions and rural development policies to reduce rural–urban migration have had little effect and are ultimately misguided. African cities will continue to grow so long as population growth rates in the region remain high. However, it is ultimately the nature of socioeconomic and political conditions in urban areas that determine the risk of urban violence.

Tackling these issues depends upon improving urban governance in the region, which requires strengthening local government capacity, addressing political obstacles to effective urban planning and management, and integrated development strategies that actively encourage the growth and diversification of urban economies in the region. Genuine efforts to confront such issues demand a significant shift in thinking within governments and international development agencies, which have for too long have been encouraging a *laissez-faire* approach to urban development. As veteran urbanist Michael Cohen has put it, 'In the city, *laissez-faire* means give up and suffer the consequences' (Cohen, 2001: 57).

Yet an alternative to *laissez-faire* urbanisation does not imply the primacy of formal political and bureaucratic organisations. Creating inclusive political arrangements often means accommodating a plural institutional environment, at least in the medium term.

However, addressing urban violence and improving the effectiveness of urban governance is too important and, in Africa, indeed urgent, to be left to city level or local government alone. It is widely recognised that late developing countries face unique challenges in a context of intensive global economic integration which require active public intervention. This includes national-level urban policies that are devised in concert with strategies that support structural economic change. Such efforts at national level are ultimately necessary to address the socioeconomic risk factors that increase the likelihood of violence in Africa's urban areas.

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