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## Epidemics, ethnicity, and empowerment: A cities recap

**If you missed the 2016 IGC Growth Week Conference, held at the London School of Economics, read our blog recaps all this week to get caught up on the best research highlights and policy insights presented at the conference. This post forms part of our blog recap series, looking specifically at ideas on urban development and growth.**

The challenges of density resulting from rapid urbanisation continue to compound transport and housing deficits in African cities, where much of the world's [future urban growth is expected](#). The recent [framework talk on cities](#), by Prof. Ed Glaeser (Harvard University) and Prof. Tony Venables (Oxford University) provided an analytical structure for exploring avenues for future research and policy questions.



*Matatu in Nairobi, Kenya*

**Image credit:** [Graham Holliday](#)

The session drew particularly on the power of new data sources to open up new areas for experimentation and research. Existing economic models clearly highlight the productivity differentials between well-managed and poorly managed cities, captured in one respect, by wage differential returns to education observed in different settings. On-going research also showcases the potential for better urban planning to raise

showcases the potential for better urban planning to raise productivity gains. Current IGC research in Zambia, for example, looks at how [urban subsidies and fines](#) could be recalibrated to create a more optimal urban environment.

- Machine learning and new data processing tools can accelerate property valuation, opening the door to newer, more robust and timely data to answer emerging research questions.
- City and municipal governments should prioritise project financing for lower-cost transportation initiatives such as [Lahore's bus rapid transit system](#) which has the potential to reduce congestion, increase connectivity, and improve job-matching prospects for Lahore's residents.
- Project financing and land use planning can support more systematic infrastructure investments, lowering living costs of African cities.
- Urban efficiency and reduced living costs can, in turn, raise the competitiveness of African labour to global manufacturing firms exiting Asia in search of new labour.
- Improvements and upgrading of urban infrastructure requires large capital investments, a paradigm shift in financing urban development could leverage public-private partnerships (PPPs) to provide sustainable avenues for such project financing.

### **Epidemics, ethnic-favouritism, and empowerment**

Following the framework session, researchers presented on emerging ideas and projects that spanned issues in urbanisation from contagion and slum settlements to road safety.

1. [Loss in the time of cholera](#) (Ambrus, Field, and Gonzalez): The researchers showed that a month-long cholera outbreak in 19<sup>th</sup> century London impacted property values in the neighbourhood for over a century after the epidemic, despite no changes to the physical infrastructure of the property.
2. [There is no free house: Ethnic patronage in a Kenyan slum](#) (Marx, Stoker, Suri). In Kibera Nairobi's biggest slum, Suri and co-authors use satellite imagery to show evidence of ethnic favouritism and patronage in slum housing markets, reflected by differences in investments and rent.
3. [Living to tell the tale: A one-third reduction in road traffic accidents from in-vehicle stickers](#) (Habyarimana and Jack). Stickers could save lives by empowering passengers of Kenya's iconic [Matatus](#) (14-seater minibuses) to challenge drivers to slow down; the most impactful stickers reduced insurance claims by 34% with a cost-effectiveness value between \$10-45 per [DALY](#).