

## **Part I**

### Understanding Sustainable Urban Planning in Africa

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# 1

## Reimagining African Cities

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### 1.1 Introduction

The idea of urban planning imagination is both historical and contemporary, and planning is increasingly viewed and employed as a purposeful, future-oriented act of imagination (Phelps, 2021). The past and present formation and patterns of cities reflect the diversity and plurality of urban planning imaginations. Therefore, urban planning transcends mere spatial development of cities to include rationalisation of activities and reshaping of urban space to enable sustainable, comfortable and congenial habitation, aiding productivity (Magnusson, 2011). Phelps (2021, p. 4) explains that planning imagination

is ever more distributed across a range of actors with differing geohistorical sensibilities. It is this that ensures that consideration of urban planning's contributions and failures should adopt vantage points well outside those of Western Europe and North America. The way in which we think about urban planning . . . should perhaps be forgiving of urban planning's inherent limitations but re-enchanted by its impressive and growing stock of knowledge, ideas, and methods and the sense of possibility it carries with it.

In other words, urban planning, whether incremental or large-scale, frequently involves a geohistorical flow of introspective and pragmatic actions that convey significant wisdom in determining desirability or otherwise. Regardless of the focus and scale, urban planning is concerned with creation of improved and liveable cities. However, Sack (2003) asserts that where there is ignorance and lack of imagination, urban planning can also produce undesirable urban spaces. This may explain the generally poor performance of urban planning across African cities (Cobbinah & Darkwah, 2017; Watson, 2009a). Still, urban planning remains an activity that has adapted to changes in society over the decades and retains its imaginative potency in developing collaborative efforts towards addressing significant urban challenges (Phelps, 2021).

In this book we recognise the importance of imagination in changing the current narrative of urban planning theory and practice in Africa. For that purpose, the book asks, Can the reimagination of urban planning in Africa, which is largely embedded in and framed around inherited colonial planning, lead to positive and improved outcomes for addressing twenty-first-century urban development challenges? Urban planning reimagination in this context refers to reconsideration, rethinking, re-evaluation and deconstruction of

past and current urban planning theory, systems and practices to focus on important issues that define and shape modern African cities. It advocates for less emphasis on and implementation of colonially inherited and imported Western systems of planning, and promotes ‘Africanisation’ in urban planning, developing and implementing planning systems that respond to the needs of the contemporary African city.

Nearly half of Africa’s population lives in urban agglomerations. From humble beginnings in the 1950s, when the continent’s urban population stood at 27 million people, it jumped to 567 million people by the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century (OECD/SWAC, 2020). While the pace of urban growth and urbanisation in Africa varies considerably from country to country, and from one region to another, the continent remains one of the fastest urbanising regions in the world, driven by high population growth and reclassification of rural settlements. For example, North Africa is the most urbanised region in Africa with over 78% of its population residing in urban areas. Official statistics indicate that the continent’s population will double between 2020 and 2050, with two-thirds of the growth occurring in urban areas (OECD/SWAC, 2020). Most of this demographic shift will take place in Africa’s growing conurbations, located predominantly along the coast of the continent – from Rabat and Algiers in the north, to Dakar and Lagos in the west, Dar es Salaam and Mombasa in the east, Cape Town and Maputo in the south, Luanda and Libreville in the central part. The locations of many African cities, particularly coastal ones, make them vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. African cities are described as being in the eye of the climate change storm, with the continent experiencing the harshest effects of climate change (Cobbinah, 2021).

Urbanisation and climate change are undoubtedly key drivers framing urban development in Africa – on the one hand cities contribute significantly to climate change through greenhouse gas emissions; on the other hand they remain centres for addressing climate change (Cobbinah & Addaney, 2019). Similarly, urbanisation provides a context and platform for generation and sharing of prosperity, but also presents considerable problems such as urban sprawl, slum growth, unemployment, congestion, air pollution and insufficient provision of social amenities (Cobbinah & Addaney, 2022). Past and current experiences of urban planning in African cities show that planning has not performed well in addressing urban challenges, and preparing cities for transformative, adaptable and sustainable futures (see Berrisford, 2014). But urban planning has enormous potential to address the colliding problems of climate change and rapid urbanisation by providing a platform to lift millions out of poverty, improve housing conditions, contribute to reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and empower cities to become hubs of knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurship.

In this case, how do we ensure that planning empowers African cities to harness the benefits of rapid urbanisation across the continent while addressing its consequent negative outcomes? Africa’s colonial urban planning history has been framed by segregation between rich and poor, north and south, indigenes and non-indigenes, and formality and informality, which has not been successful in addressing critical and urgent urban development problems. How do we avoid the mistakes of the past to ensure that planning in African cities responds to serious climate change challenges in an inclusive, equitable and

sustainable manner? Business as usual in urban planning practice in African cities is not an option. So what should urban planning practice reflect – and why do we need to get urban planning right in African cities?

### 1.2 Why Reimagine Urban Planning in African Cities?

The turn of the twenty-first century marked the beginning of a major shift in global thinking about the future of African cities. This shift is necessitated by the complications of two defining phenomena. The first is the recognition that, for the first time in history, 60% of Africa's population will be living in cities by 2050 (OECD/SWAC, 2020), and that there has been a failure of urban planning to manage the continent's rapid urbanisation as defined and framed by informality (Finn & Cobbinah, 2022). The second significant phenomenon is the rate and scale of climate change impacts coupled with issues such as urban poverty and substantial infrastructure deficits producing significant problems in African cities and requiring specific planning responses. In effect, reimagining urban planning in Africa is a recognition of the urgency to fundamentally reconsider theory and practice to enable it to play a significant role in addressing the defining characteristics of rapid urbanisation and climate change in African cities.

Although the inadequacies of urban planning in addressing complications of rapid urbanisation and climate change in African cities are complex and cannot always be blamed on planning itself, Watson (2009a) observes that planning systems in most African cities are either colonially inherited regimes or adopted from the Western world to suit specific local political and ideological agendas. Across several African cities, the colonially inherited planning systems and approaches have been entrenched post colonisation, despite the context evolving significantly. The importance of urban planning to reflect local aspirations, produce functional and inclusive urban spaces, and generate pro-poor and environmental conservation outcomes has therefore received limited consideration. There is a gap between the increasingly techno-managerial and marketised systems of frequently older forms of urban planning and the everyday lived experiences of urban citizens, particularly the marginalised and impoverished urban populations existing mostly under conditions of informality in Africa (Watson, 2009a). Thus, there is a demand for a fundamental rethink of urban planning theory and practice in promoting sustainable, inclusive and resilient cities in Africa. This book, *Reimagining Urban Planning in Africa*, offers additional and alternative theoretical and empirical insights to provide planners a framework for rethinking planning to engender sustainable futures.

Worldwide, there has been commitment towards sustainable urban development via urban planning since the introduction of the concept of sustainable development in the 1980s. This global commitment was strengthened in 2015 with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with Goal 11 specifically focusing on making cities sustainable, resilient and adaptable. In addition, the New Urban Agenda and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want are demonstrable evidence of global and regional commitment towards improved urban planning and development. Given that cities hold more than half

of the world's population and two-thirds of the global economy, it is argued that these global and regional commitments have been adopted in an urban world and their successes strongly depend on effective urban planning and management. Unfortunately, not all cities are making an appreciable effort towards actualising the sustainable urban development vision. As previously mentioned, Africa remains one of the fastest urbanising continents worldwide, with diverse urban settlements but extremely weak and dysfunctional urban planning systems. There is a huge gap between urban planning ideals and realities across African cities. The continent's urban spaces are frequently reported to be confronted with similar critical urban and infrastructure development challenges that are impediments to sustainable development: urban sprawl; increasing poverty; slum proliferation; unregulated informality; transport infrastructure shortfalls; water and sanitation challenges; and urban crime.

Meanwhile, urban planning is recognised as possessing transformative power to address key urbanisation and climate change challenges and represents a pivotal first step to empowering cities towards sustainable development. The question that emerges is, Why is urban planning not working for African cities? Urban planning on the continent needs to be interrogated, deconstructed and reimagined to reflect local aspirations, address African challenges, and promote inclusive and just futures. While there are individual reported studies/cases of urban planning experiences in African countries, little is known about how rethinking and deconstruction of the history and current experiences of urban planning within the context of global and regional sustainable development goals can transform the urban spaces on the continent. In a rapidly urbanising continent, sustainable development cannot be achieved without seriously considering how urban planning reflects the identity of the local community and contributes to global and regional commitments focusing on sustainable transformation of cities. This is particularly important given that cities are the drivers of innovative sustainable development at the local level. Urban planning as a product, a profession and a process is critical to the future of African cities and should be reimagined to deliver sustainable outcomes.

The concept of urban planning – variously referred to as land use planning, spatial planning and town planning – is a multifaceted activity and an approach through which authority is exercised in the guidance on spatial development of a community, deciding, coordinating and regulating future distribution of land use activities in a rational manner (see CEC, 1997; Kunzmann, 2005; Magnusson, 2011). Urban planning has become a progressively more widespread and indispensable pursuit framed by important 'wisdom of what works and what doesn't, what could be desirable and what is not' (Phelps, 2021, p. 1). With its specific-discipline framing and professional forward-looking nature, urban planning forms part of the political decision-making process that aims to implement economic, ecological and social objectives in spatial terms (Pahl-Weber & Schwartz, 2018). It has radical progressive possibilities and recognises the importance of politics and power play in shaping and framing sustainable and functional urban futures. As argued by Cobbinah and Finn (2022), urban planning's application, theoretical expansion and practical interrogation in African urban contexts provide foundational insights into how these possibilities can be reimagined and achieved.

Urban planning at this time of critical challenges from urbanisation and climate change in African cities compels theorists to question how planning can plausibly be reimagined for a functional, inclusive and sustainable future. The need for progressive planning norms in African cities is urgent and highlights the value of offering voice to urban citizens who want to participate in the management of urbanisation and climate change. The trend towards climate change management via urban planning is emerging along with the increasing and devastating impacts of climate change dominating urban development discourse in recent times in Africa (Cobbinah & Addaney, 2019; Henderson et al., 2017; Lawson, 2016). Climate change research describes African cities as severely impaired when it comes to preparation towards climate change impacts (Broto, 2014; IPCC, 2021). Existing climate change impacts, including sea level rise, rising temperatures and unpredictable rainfall patterns, are expected to continue to destabilise urban Africa through catastrophic flood events, prolonged droughts and unbearable heatwaves. As reported by the United Nations Office for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR, 2012), the African continent recorded the 10 worst drought catastrophes worldwide between 1970 and 2010. At the same time, the number of people exposed to flood disasters more than tripled between 1970 and 2010 – from 500,000 per annum to about 2 million per annum in 2010. The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report further emphasises the uncertainty, seriousness and reality of climate change impacts in African cities (IPCC, 2021).

Compounding the situation further, the unplanned pattern of urbanisation across African cities is contributing to the production of dysfunctional urban landscapes that threaten the relevance of urban planning. As previously discussed, problems of urban sprawl, slum proliferation, infrastructure deficits, urban poverty and unemployment are commonplace in African cities (see UN-Habitat, 2014). These problems are aggravated by the legacies of colonial urban planning systems and later structural adjustment measures, which have exacerbated the vulnerability of urban citizens living and working in African cities (Cobbinah & Finn, 2022). The embeddedness of colonial urban planning legacies (Berrisford, 2011) within contemporary debates on the uneven effects of global capitalism is reflected in the disproportionate impacts of climate change on African cities and citizens. For example, the increasing urban population growth in Africa poses considerable problems across its cities, with inadequate public support and limited climate management planning mechanisms already in place. Between 2018 and 2035, the population of African cities such as Kampala (Uganda) is estimated to increase by an average of 5.1%; Dar es Salaam's (Tanzania) population will grow by 4.8%; those of Abuja and Lagos (Nigeria) will rise by 4.5% and 3.5% respectively; Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) will record 4.3% growth; and Luanda (Angola) is expected to increase by 3.7% (see Hewston, 2018). With these African cities mostly characterised as at 'extreme risk' in the climate vulnerability index, their increasing growth without a corresponding inclusive urban planning strategy will subject their citizens to unbearable climate change and urbanisation impacts. While Jenkins et al. (2014) report that about 70% of residents in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) live in informal settlements lacking basic services, Obeng-Odoom (2011) observes similar experiences in Accra (Ghana). Therefore, given the increasing climate change and demographic problems, it is vital to reimagine urban planning in African cities to deal with and adapt to climatically tenuous urban environments.

### **1.2.1 The Realities of Urban Planning in African Cities**

Urban planning, through its adaptability and transience, provides a platform to experiment and collaboratively work with local communities to deliver community-based urban outcomes and climate management strategies. It requires state planning authorities and local communities to cooperatively consider and develop strategies to manage the increasing risks from population growth and climate change (Phelps, 2021). In this sense, a couple of questions remain unanswered: What factors contribute to ineffective urban planning narratives in African cities? Why is urban planning in Africa not evolving to address the critical challenges of urbanisation and climate change confronting the continent's cities?

The historical literature on urban planning in Africa (e.g., Cobbinah & Darkwah, 2017; Home, 2013; Njoh, 2009) highlights the role and impact of colonisation in creating spatial and socio-economic segregation reflected in formal vs informal economies, formal vs informal housing, and formal vs informal governance. With urban planning creating divisions, as formality was characterised as a structured model and informality as a deviation (Cobbinah & Finn, 2022), the putative purpose of introducing it during colonisation in Africa in response to health emergencies was defeated. Over the years, three interesting schools of thought on urban planning have emerged within the context of African urban development. As argued by Njoh (2009) and Cobbinah and Darkwah (2017), urban planning in African cities is first characterised as a 'colonial tool' for domination and control under the pretext of slum improvement, safety and security, infrastructure upgrading and urban renewal across African cities; second, it is described as a 'legalist' framework for creating cultural and structural isolation in Ghana (Adarkwa, 2012), fashioning socio-economic segregation in Congo (Njoh, 2009) and Nigeria (Cobbinah & Darkwah, 2017), and producing segregationist development during the apartheid era in South Africa (Home, 2013); and lastly, urban planning in Africa is contested as an 'elitist' agenda where local communities and urban citizens are unfavourably related to 'formal' professional planning practices in a post-colonial era. While many (e.g., Adarkwa, 2012; Home, 2013; Njoh, 2009) have contested and criticised the 'colonial tool' framework, others (e.g., Okpala, 2009) have debated the repudiation of legalist frameworks and challenge the disconnect between formal and informal spaces and activities in African cities. Some (e.g., Lwasa & Kinuthia-Njenga, 2012) have also discussed the awareness of the importance of evolving professional dynamics shaping the re-characterisation of urban planning as an activity that requires urban citizens' inputs and participation.

Urban planning in African cities has also been much debated within urban health spheres (see Njoh, 2016). By implication, urban planning has contributed to the management or otherwise of global and regional epidemics (e.g., COVID-19, Ebola) in African cities, with the prospect of improvement over time. However, the continuous institutionalised pattern and practice of colonial planning regimes producing and encouraging the formal order as the model has spurred tyrannical urban planning measures, including eviction and demolition of informal settlements and activities as well as inadequate social service delivery for citizens in informal settlement (Cobbinah & Finn, 2022). In Africa's growing urban



conurbations it is not uncommon to find state planning authorities exercising heavy-handedness in dealing with their own citizens, mostly those living in informal settlements. Meanwhile, the informal sector forms over 80% of Africa's urban economy (Charmes, 2012), and as of 2010 informal settlements housed over 200 million people in African cities, representing 61.7% of the continent's urban population (Racelma, 2012). Predictably, the repressive urban planning measures are contributing to the reproduction of vulnerabilities in African cities.

It is worth acknowledging, however, that these planning measures are gradually being addressed in some African cities as part of efforts to manage the threats of rapid urbanisation and climate change. There are ongoing positive dialogues on blurring the sharp distinction between formal vs informal, recognising the benefits of informality in Africa's urban planning system. Cross-border sharing of urban planning knowledge produced by technological innovation is emerging in several African countries, which Cobbinah and Finn (2022) consider critical in addressing climate change. For instance, Dakar (Senegal) and Accra (Ghana) have developed an urban planning strategy focusing on climate adaptation with the support of 100 Resilient Cities – an initiative for equipping cities for resilience in urban planning and development (Accra Metropolitan Assembly, 2019; Ville De Dakar & 100 Resilient Cities, 2016). Similarly, African countries such as Zimbabwe and Nigeria have, in principle, embarked on urban planning democratisation via institutional and legislative reforms, and stakeholder engagement in structural planning projects respectively (see Okpala, 2009). While these attempts are encouraging, reimagining urban planning within these emerging frameworks requires greater attention, especially during this period when there are improved urban management technologies (e.g., GIS – geographic information system – and remote sensing) and increased global and regional commitments (e.g., SDGs, New Urban Agenda – NUA) towards sustainable futures. As argued by Cobbinah and Finn (2022), the debate on the formal vs informal in the production and management of African cities continues to offer space for ongoing discourse, and an urban planning theory and practice that blurs the sharp contrast between formal and informal and recognises the symbiotic relationship between the two in developing and advancing inclusive and sustainable urban future is required.

### ***1.2.2 Urban Planning: What It Means for Reimagining African Cities***

Urban planning continues to be practised and remains useful in African cities, yet it is often linked to negative public characterisations such as elitist activity, non-participatory, segregation, informal economic activities, and demolition of informal settlements (see Home, 2013; Okpala, 2009). Cobbinah and Darkwah (2017) explain that, on the one hand, urban planning in Africa is viewed as a tool for addressing otherwise insurmountable problems of urban growth compounding existing weak social, economic, political and geographic growth factors and, on the other hand, as a problematic professional practice denying the reflection of urban citizens' aspirations and involvement in decisions and actions that concern them, and that ought to be addressed through reforms. Nonetheless,

despite urban planning in African cities drawing interest from across academic disciplines and professional practices, the focus of analysis commonly centres narrowly on particular aspects with inadequate cross-disciplinary and professional stimulation. For instance, previous literature often examines urban planning in Africa by focusing on history (Silva & Matos, 2014), challenges (Berrisford, 2011, 2014) and potential (Cobbinah & Addaney, 2022), mostly within specific cities. While these issues are relevant in understanding urban planning in African cities, they do not offer ways in which urban planning on the continent can be reimagined to address the critical challenges of rapid urbanisation and climate change.

Arising from this account of earlier research is an inclination to restrict the appraisal of urban planning theory and practice to urban citizens who live and work in the ‘formal’ spaces of African cities, disregarding those who mostly live and work informally. While urban planning should be all-embracing, Cobbinah and Darkwah (2017) state that artificial borders cross spatial, political and economic domains and the embeddedness of formal vs informal statuses have choked wide-ranging cross-cutting analysis and inclusive urban planning practices in African cities by awarding state planning authorities excessive power and shifting attention away from urban citizens, who should be the most powerful stakeholders in urban planning.

Advancing the urban planning discourse further, Phelps (2021, p. 4) calls for urban planning to focus on the way it should be seen by stakeholders (e.g., academics, professionals, citizens, politicians) as tolerating its innate shortcomings, and to capitalise on the flourishing of knowledge, methods and potentialities, which resonates with the African situation. Other understandings, such as urban planning as ‘a way of rationalising politics by rendering it governable’ (Magnusson, 2013, p. 132), the means of societal modernisation (Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, 2020) and an approach to confronting wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973), provide a context to challenge and rethink static and colonial acts of urban planning dominating African cities, and support the agency of marginalised people whose informal enterprises are often forbidden and otherwise delegitimised (Cobbinah & Finn, 2022). Gleeson and Low’s (2000) characterisation of urban planning as a dialectical process offering a platform for reconciliation provides an avenue for understanding the tensions between formal and informal spaces in African cities and developing strategies towards their resolution by recognising the activities of different groups, individuals and sectors.

Given that rapid urbanisation and climate change impacts are projected to be acute and severe in African cities (see Cobbinah & Addaney, 2019; IPCC, 2021; OECD/SWAC, 2020), urban planning should go beyond the mere dialectics of formal as the model and informality as a deviation and seek to establish and promote inclusive, adaptable and sustainable practices. Within this context, recognising the value of a reimagined urban planning system, thinking and practice in African cities can promote social, spatial and political connections within and between the state and diverse stakeholder groups across the city (and across economic, spatial and political domains within it), which is fundamental to understanding and addressing issues of resource distribution, power, security and inclusiveness.