Call for Contributions

Urbanisation in Africa: Realities, Aspirations and Solutions

In the next 30 years, African cities will be home to an additional 950 million people, making it the continent with the highest urban growth rate in the world. Besides Africa’s population growth, climate change and conflict induced migration are among the main drivers of this development. Unlike on other continents, urbanisation in Africa is not linked to industrialisation, fuelling the prevalence of urban slums and poverty in most African cities.

Although policy makers and media in Europe often highlight the magnitude of the African urbanisation challenge, many questions as to how best to help African cities to become more liveable and sustainable places in the context of diverse social, economic and cultural realities remain unanswered.

Against this backdrop, the Africa offices of the Heinrich Böll Foundation invite African researchers and urbanists to contribute briefs that shed light on some of the key challenges and blind spots in African urban development. The contributions will be collated into a reader exploring alternative visions for African city-making that often go unnoticed or are neglected in the prevailing discourse, and thus challenge dominant city planning narratives. With this, the foundation intends to kick-start debates between relevant African and European stakeholders to reflect on effective strategies towards building inclusive and sustainable cities.

Contributions are expected to be written in accessible, non-academic language, to be clearly articulated and succinct, and to be void of general introductions to urbanisation in Africa. They should not be sector specific (e.g., on food, mobility, housing) but rather provide a holistic sense of the day-to-day realities in African cities. They should highlight the different and creative ways in which urban communities autonomously provide for their own needs and secure their livelihoods in the absence of public services. Best practices should be emphasised and the perspective of crucial stakeholders (e.g., citizens, town planners, political decision makers etc.) included through citations. The use of photos and other visual material is encouraged. Contributions should not be longer than 1,200 words.

We also strongly encourage the submission of poetic contributions, creative writings and utopias of Africa’s urban future.

If interested, kindly send an abstract of maximum half a page responding to one of the areas of interest outlined with guiding questions below. Please add your CV and references to previous publications. Submissions should be sent to Lamese Abrahams at lamese.abrahams@za.boell.org by 26.05.2023 indicating the following subject matter: “Abstract for reader on urbanisation in Africa”.

Topics of choice for contributions:

1. Effects of colonial thinking and the right to the city
   - How can the effects of colonialism on urban infrastructure still be felt today, and to what extent are today’s visions for African cities still shaped by ‘foreign’ thinking and perspectives?
   - What does this mean for inclusive access to the city? What role do the everyday realities of the poor majority of citizens play in shaping current city visions?
   - How would alternative visions look like and what should they be informed by? How does a genuinely African urbanisation pathway look like?

2. Gender-inclusive cities
   - What relevance and standing does gender-inclusive city design have on the continent today?
   - How does/should feminist city planning in Africa look like?
   - How can alternative governance structures such as commoning ensure inclusive and just cities?
- How can institutional and political power structures relevant for city making be adjusted to ensure gender-inclusiveness in urban planning and development?
- Are there examples of promising efforts to integrate gender aspects into city making?

3. Secondary/silent/emerging cities
- How big of a role do secondary cities play in Africa’s projected urban growth?
- What are the challenges for such cities in terms of planning and development?
- Do they have adequate mechanisms and institutions for responding to their rapid urbanisation?
- What relevance do traditional leadership and community structures and processes have?
- How can these cities help stabilize democratic institutions and promote democratic values despite their volatile environments?

4. Transition towards “sustainability” in the context of African cities
- In which way do/should transition strategies towards “sustainable cities” in the African context differ from international efforts focusing on CO2 reduction and climate resilience?
- Are visions imagining African cities as a common good a realistic alternative? And how could a pathway look like that combines “sustainable city making” with the “right to the city”?
- How do international funding mechanisms need to be adjusted to ensure that scarce financial resources are equally distributed between all residents of a city? How could, for example, vulnerable groups (e.g., migrants, informal workers etc.) gain direct access to national or international climate funds? And what would this mean for the overall development of the cities?