AFRICAN CITIES RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

Working Paper 1

# Politics, systems and domains:

## A conceptual framework for the African Cities Research Consortium

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September 2021

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## Abstract

African cities are critical to the continent's prospects of achieving environmentally sustainable forms of prosperity and poverty reduction. Can Africa cities help generate processes of national economic development? Can they be transformed in ways that secure more inclusive and sustainable futures for urban residents? The answers to these questions hinge to a large extent on the political and political economy factors that shape, at different levels, how cities and their systems operate in relation to different domains of urban development. African cities are comprised of systems that produce, circulate and deliver various resources, goods and services. These systems often fail to function effectively because they are poorly resourced, weakly integrated and governed in accordance with interests and ideas that undermine inclusive forms of development. This is apparent across multiple domains of urban development, whether economic, social or relating to the built environment. This paper sets out a conceptual framework that captures how the interaction of politics and political economy with city systems is shaping the prospects of African cities to generate processes of prosperity and poverty reduction. It does this by integrating cutting-edge thinking on *political settlements*, *city systems* and *urban development domains* into a new and holistic framework of analysis. This framework seeks to provide new insights into the challenges of urban development in Africa and to help guide the work of the multiple political and policy actors responsible for promoting and implementing reforms in African cities.

**Keywords:** African cities, political settlements, city systems, urban development domains

**Cite this paper as:**

Kelsall, T, Mitlin, D, Schindler, S and Hickey, S (2021) Politics, systems and domains: A conceptual framework for the African Cities Research Consortium. ACRC Working Paper 2021-01. Manchester: The University of Manchester. Available online: www.african-cities.org

**ISBN:** 978-1-915163-00-4

The African Cities Research Consortium is funded with UK aid from the UK government. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

# 1. Overview

## 1.1. Introduction

African cities today are among the fastest growing in the world, and with this growth come enormous problems and opportunities. Opportunities relate to the potential advantages of urban agglomeration for enhancing connectivity, accelerating economic and human development and, for elites, broadcasting their visions of modernity. Problems are found, among other things, in crowded living conditions, inadequate sanitation and waste management, increased pollution, food insecurity, everyday violence, and the developmental and political consequences of growing inequalities. To date, mainstream urban development interventions in Africa have often been designed primarily through a sectoral and technical lens. But there is abundant evidence that they are also intimately related to questions of power and politics, and that solutions have to take into account the complex interrelations and interactions between urban processes and systems. Responding to this recognition, the African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC) is committed to bringing a fresh, more politically informed and integrated approach to creating inclusive, productive, safe and sustainable cities – cities, that is, which meet the ambitions of Sustainable Development Goal 11.

This paper sets out the conceptual approach that the ACRC proposes to use to frame its investigations into the political economy drivers of complex problems within and around African cities. These investigations will in turn contribute to a new generation of intervention approaches that effectively address complex interactions between problems and opportunities, and which are attuned to taking on the additional challenges of the climate emergency. The aim is to uncover the underlying, interrelated and systemic constraints that are preventing African cities from offering sustainable and inclusive development futures to their residents and from playing a more productive role in supporting national- level processes of economic development and poverty reduction. Although no single approach will be sufficient in the face of these challenges, our combination of political economy and systemic analysis forms a necessary part of the search to identify the kinds of politically astute and effective responses required within and around African cities at the current juncture.

The framework draws on and combines recent scholarship on both urban development and the broader politics of development to formulate a multiscalar approach to urban political economy analysis. Although drafted by members of the ACRC leadership team, it has been subject to successive rounds of critical discussion within ACRC's wider partnership and to external peer review, followed by subsequent rounds of revision. ACRC has also commissioned a review paper on the urban politics and political economy literature that will stand alongside this conceptual note, adding depth and support to key parts of it, and acting as a resource for the partnership and beyond (see Collord, Goodfellow and Asante, 2021 forthcoming).

The framework consists of three main elements:

*Political settlements analysis* offers ACRC a way to understand the political economy of African cities. The notion of a political settlement seeks to go beyond formal notions of governance to uncover the underlying forms of power and politics that shape which institutions emerge and how they actually function in practice. Section 2 sets out the origins of the concept, offers a typology of different political settlements and starts to identify how it can frame our political economy analysis of African cities. It also explains how we will test the validity of this framework and extend it as required.

*City of systems*. The approach generally taken to "city-as-systems" thinking in the urban studies literature is to frame cities as metabolic systems that are constituted by the flows of resources and energy that enable economic activity and social reproduction. Concerned that this will not enable a sufficiently nuanced and politically sensitive analysis, the approach that we are proposing here, in Section 3, is to use a systems approach to help emphasise the significance of a city's *materiality* (how it is physically constructed and maintained by flows of energy and resources, how its built environment is constituted by material stocks) and to go beyond this, to include social systems as well. Meanwhile, we propose a third concept of "domains" that can capture the ways in which several systems combine and overlap to produce particular problems and solutions for urban development. The notion of "domains" also offers a better route to reframing sectors in a broader, more systemic and more politicised way.

*Urban development domains* can be defined as fields of power, policy and practice that are relevant to the solution of particular problems. They are constituted by actors (political, bureaucratic, professional and popular) that seek to claim authority and rights over a particular field, such as housing, through various means. This includes the formation of epistemic communities of expertise to expound particular ideas, build strategic alliances/coalitions to achieve strategic objectives, direct activism, policy reform, new programming approaches and reformulated practices. Narrower sectors are subsumed within domains and any given domain is likely to be sustained and shaped by multiple city systems. Domains are highly political, both because they are sites of contestation between actors with different interests and ideas *and* because they often play a wider role in sustaining the balance of power within the city and national-level settlements (for example, through providing rent-seeking opportunities, legitimacy and/or votes for powerful players). Section 4 sets out what we mean by domains and summarises the domains that we have selected for further investigation. These are elaborated in more detail in the Appendix.

None of these levels of the framework has an a priori explanatory primacy. Each is interwoven with the others through a complex set of ideational, material and social relations, which jointly explain the emergence and persistence of key urban problems. Nevertheless, we expect empirical investigations to reveal that, in some cases, the root of the problem lies more in one dimension than the other – for example, a set of

material interests integral to the political settlement, or a particular idea that captivates actors in a specific domain. In other cases, the source of the problem will be more evenly distributed across the dimensions of our framework, as in the case where the beliefs of actors in a domain can be traced to a set of interests that have emerged alongside the evolution of particular city systems that play a significant, if not necessarily crucial, role in reproducing the political settlement. Other problems may reflect the immense difficulties of working across city systems and at multiple scales, such as the failure in sanitation provision in dense informal neighbourhoods; here, solutions potentially involve tricky political negotiations (including around access to private land) but a lack of impetus to advancing new approaches may mean that politics has not yet come to the fore.

The purpose of the framework and the research it gives rise to is not, in the first instance, to produce a grand explanatory theory of the problems of African urban development. Rather, it is to diagnose the source of problems, improve understanding, provide pointers for reformers on how and where to focus their energies, and help such reformers anticipate the problems that they will have to address. As per the discussion above, in some cases the greatest progress will be made by focusing reform energies on one dimension (while still being mindful of the others), while in others, all dimensions will require roughly equal attention. Our ultimate aim is to inform better decisionmaking by urban policymakers and reformers.

## 1.2. Putting the ACRC framework in context: Identifying the “exogenous” factors that shape the political economy of development in African cities

Cities are nested within larger political, social, economic and environmental systems that are constantly changing over time, and as a result they are influenced by a host of exogenous conditions and events. Although these factors are not incorporated directly within our framework, we are aware of their broader significance and briefly set some of them out here, before turning to the framework itself.

In historical terms, the subjugation of African societies and their inclusion in European colonial empires had a profound influence on urbanisation and the size and shape of their cities. Urban systems were designed to facilitate the export of agricultural products and resources to imperial metropoles, while cities were internally fragmented and highly segregated (Rabinow, 1995; Burton, 2001; Myers, 2011). In most cities, European settler colonists lived and worked in well-planned districts and enjoyed access to urban infrastructure, while authorities restricted native Africans from migrating to and travelling within cities (ibid.). Furthermore, colonialism conditioned the economic development of African societies and established long-term relations of dependency that were largely maintained in the postcolonial period. Many newly independent African countries sought to structurally transform their economies and foster industrialisation, yet modest success in the 1960s and early 1970s gave way to economic crisis in the 1980s (Mkandawire, 1988; Stein, 1992). In order to obtain

emergency loans and assistance from multilateral development banks, African countries implemented structural adjustment programmes which led to deindustrialisation and the re-primarisation of their economies. The subsequent "commodity super-cycle", and China's unprecedented demand for natural resources in the 2000s, led to economic growth and fuelled a narrative that Africa is "rising" (Taylor, 2016). However, even after the end of the commodity boom in 2014, many African economies remain natural-resource exporters, dependent on more powerful states and multinational corporations that are lead firms in global value chains. They are also subject to the changing nature of global capitalism, including financialisation and associated processes of asset inflation and property speculation (on the rise of African cities as new real estate frontiers, for example, see Gillespie, 2020). While it remains to be seen if "industries without smokestacks" can foster the structural transformation of African economies and societies (see Newfarmer et al., 2018), it is clear that international political economy and geopolitics influence African cities and the ideas and incentives of elite actors that shape their governance.

International agreements surrounding trade and debt have historically influenced African economies, and China's growing influence and interest in Africa adds a further layer of complexity amidst a "new Scramble for Africa" (Carmody, 2016). While others have argued against discerning a single overarching logic to Chinese development aid and investment (Brautigam, 2009), the US government has charged China with "debt-trap diplomacy" (Bolton, 2018), and it is clear that the geopolitics of US-Sino rivalry influence African societies and cities. Perhaps most significantly, intercity infrastructure is proliferating across Africa (Deloitte, 2019), as China, the US and a host of other countries compete to integrate at least part of African economies into their respective spheres of influence. For African governments, this geopolitical competition may offer an opportunity to implement long-standing spatial development plans. Indeed, many of the cities that we will research are sites of significant intercity infrastructure development projects, and we will seek to account for their impacts both on local communities often displaced by large-scale projects and on the balance of power between political economy players at multiple levels.

African cities are also entwined within regional networks and flows that stretch beyond national boundaries and which often play an influential role in terms of political economy and security issues. This is particularly the case for cities that operate as regional hubs or are located close to national borders: the cross-border trade in minerals within central Africa, drugs across west Africa, and arms within the Horn of Africa (including inflows from the Middle East) are all examples of how regional networks of influence and exchange can shape the stability of political settlements, the productivity of city economies and the security of urban areas. In particular, ongoing conflicts influence cities in a host of ways, particularly in fragile states. Not only do they reduce security on an everyday basis, but they frequently result in increased in-migration, which authorities and city systems struggle to cope with. Where relevant, we will seek to account for the ways in which city systems are adapted in the face of such

pressures. However, the embeddedness of African cities and city dwellers within supracity and supranational networks also includes many positive flows. The complexity of migration flows between urban and rural areas has long been recognised and has helped to secure livelihoods (Tacoli, 2006). Finally, many city residents are embedded within social networks whose reach extends far beyond the city and is often transnational or even global. Some may receive remittances from family members who have migrated internationally, while others may be members of transnational diasporic communities. City residents can leverage these social networks in ways that influence city systems, political outcomes and domain-level activities.

Two further sets of “external” factors – environmental and health-related – are particularly worthy of note here. African cities are influenced by anthropogenic climate change and its impact on earth systems such as El Niño. Our research will account for the ways in which environmental systems and events, some of which may occur at great distances from cities, influence city systems and political outcomes. For example, drought may lead to food insecurity in cities themselves, or in rural areas, which could precipitate rural-to-urban migration. Furthermore, governments and civil society organisations in some cities may seek to mitigate the impacts of climate change by adapting city systems. For example, investments may be made to coastline management infrastructure or governments may seek to resettle at-risk residents living in flood-prone areas. In terms of health shocks, the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated how cities around the world are vulnerable to the transmission of pathogens. African cities have borne the brunt of the health and economic impacts of the pandemic and governmental responses to it. Our analysis will account for the impact of Covid-19 on cities, as well as the efforts to mitigate its impact through innovative governance responses from both states and civil society. Where relevant, we will also account for risks posed by other exogenous pathogens and efforts to mitigate them.

However, we also recognise the uneven impacts of exogenous factors within and between urban spaces. Cities are differentially located within global value chains and global migration networks, and some are more attractive than others in their potential for advantageously considered geopolitics. Within cities, some neighbourhoods may be relatively disconnected, due to lack of transport infrastructure and/or a lack of visibility to the formal city.

In summary, African societies have historically been deeply integrated with the global economy, albeit on highly unequal terms, and this has shaped their cities and urban systems. The influence of the colonial period on the morphology of many African cities is evident across the continent. In the postcolonial era, newly independent states pursued ambitious development agendas, which tended to incorporate import substitution, but this ultimately gave way to renewed emphasis on resource extraction. A host of powerful states – namely, the US and China, but regional powers as well – are currently vying for influence in Africa. It is in this context that African societies are seeking to cope with profound environmental change and health risks (most notably

Covid-19). These factors are nominally exogenous to our framework, in the sense that they will not be explicitly theorised and subject to intensive investigation. Nonetheless, our framework is historically rooted and focused on the influence of exogenous factors – namely, the relationship between African societies and the global economy, global environmental change and novel threats to public health – that shape political economies, city systems and urban development domains.[1] We will scope out the nature and extent of these exogenous factors in relation to each of the 13 cities that we will investigate in our next phase of research, and track the extent to which they are influential, in relation to both the different levels of our framework and the priority problems that we identify within each city. Recognising that cities are located within these wider factors and associated relations, we now turn to the main components of our framework.

## 2. Political settlements analysis

### 2.1. Introduction

Few concepts have captured the imagination of the conflict and development community in recent years as powerfully as the idea of a "political settlement". At its most ambitious, "political settlements analysis" (PSA) promises to explain why conflicts occur and states collapse, the conditions for their successful rehabilitation and different developmental pathways from peace, and, more generally, to explain how elites become committed and states become capable of delivering on processes of state-building and development. This in turn can help generate a clearer sense of how to better fit development policy to country context. As such, it provides an analytical framework for development actors working in fragile and conflict-affected states and/or frustrated by difficulties in securing developmental reforms in more stable states (Ingram, 2014).

This section of our concept note sets out how we will use political settlements analysis, in conjunction with the concept of "city of systems" and "urban development domains", to explain and help solve the persistence of complex problems in urban settings. In doing so, it builds on work by some of the founders of political settlements analysis, as well as members of The University of Manchester's Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) research centre,[2] including those who have already explored the value of political settlements analysis in the urban context (Goodfellow, 2018; Goodfellow and Jackman, 2020).

### 2.2. Origins and nature of the concept

Political settlements analysis can be traced to at least three sources: (1) the theory and practice of conflict resolution and peace building, which uses the term "political settlement" to imply a brokered peace deal that includes far-reaching political reforms;

[1] For a fuller discussion of the political economy of African cities, see the ACRC companion paper (Collord, Goodfellow and Asante, 2021).
[2] See www.effective-states.org

(2) the political and historical sociology of Western countries, in which a niche strand refers to political settlements as elite pacts, broad ideological shifts, or new social contracts that helped resolve conflict and enable the continuation of (relatively) peaceful politics, such as the UK's Glorious Revolution/Act of Settlement 1688-1701; the post-1945 welfare state political settlement; the post-1979 neoliberal political settlement; (3) the political economy of lower-income countries, where the "political settlement" has been used to refer to a reproducible balance of power and institutions, the dynamics of which have important implications for what types of development policy are likely to succeed or fail.

Inevitably, definitions of political settlement have evolved as their use in the development context has grown. The ESID programme has drawn from the aforementioned sources to define a political settlement as: an agreement or common understanding among a society's powerful groups about the basic rules (or institutions) of the political and economic game, which, by providing opportunities for those groups to acquire a minimally acceptable level of benefits, prevents a descent into all-out warfare.[3]

Political settlements analysis offers ACRC an overarching framework through which to understand the political economy of African cities and its dynamic relationship to persistent urban problems. The notion of a political settlement seeks to go beyond formal notions of governance to uncover the underlying forms of power and politics that shape which institutions emerge[4] and how they actually function in practice. Underlying political settlements is the recognition that if institutions do not work for powerful groups, they are likely to be resisted and modified to deliver for elites. Approaches to policy and programming reform with regards to African cities need to be politically smart, in order to navigate this context and achieve their goals.

## 2.3. A typology of political settlements

To date, political settlements has primarily been applied at the level of national politics. As a starting point, the ACRC will employ the ESID typology of political settlements and accompanying dataset (Schulz and Kelsall, 2021) to both understand the influence of national elites on urban politics and political economy, and to consider contestation between elites within the urban context. The ESID typology classifies political settlements along two dimensions: (1) the social foundation – that is, the breadth, depth and social identity of the powerful groups that make up the settlement's "insiders"; and (2) the power configuration – that is, the degree of concentration of power in the country's top leadership.

These two dimensions are hypothesised to affect the degree of elite commitment to, and state capacity to implement, inclusive development policy. For those planning

[3] Paraphrased from Kelsall et al. (forthcoming).
[4] With institutions being the norms, values and practices common to any given society.

development interventions, the level of ambition of the reforms that are attempted, their *modus operandi*, and the partners that are chosen to work through, should all be calibrated to these dimensions of the political settlement.[5]

### *2.3.1. The social foundation*

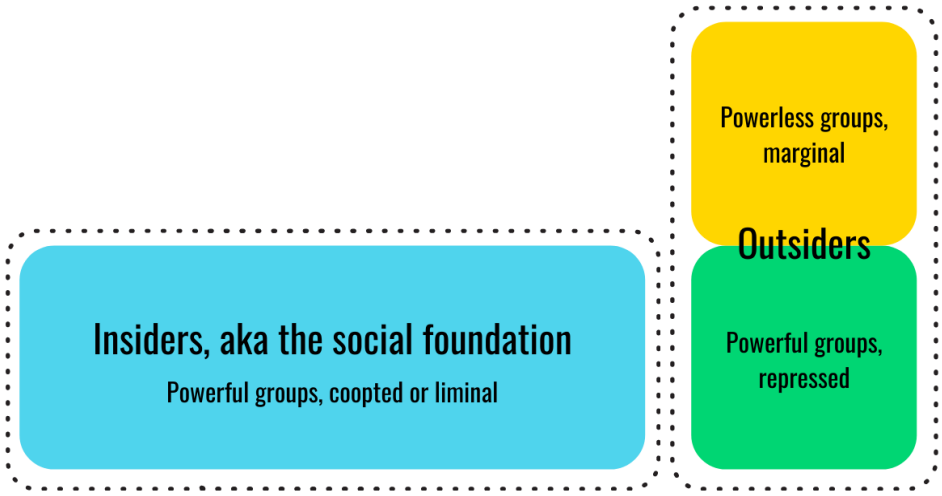
In more detail, all societies contain groups that have the organisational, institutional, ideological or financial capability to make serious trouble for high-level political leaders, by fighting, demonstrating, criticising, voting, withdrawing funds, and so on. Politically smart leaders will recognise that they need to respond to such groups through some combination of incorporation (through compromise or co-optation that involves delivering benefits of some description),[6] repression (deploying violence or the threat of violence), or a combination of the two. In addition, there will be marginal groups that lack disruptive potential. The powerful groups that are co-opted form the settlement's "social foundation". Where the social foundation is broad (covering a range of social identities, such as racial, ethnic, gendered) and deep (covering a range of income or class groups), high-level leaders will be incentivised to try and deliver broad-based, inclusive benefits to the population (though a few groups may still be excluded). Where it is narrow and/or shallow, they are likely to demonstrate less commitment to this.

Figure 1 illustrates these different groups. The left-hand rectangle represents the social foundation – that is, powerful co-opted groups – plus "in-between" or "liminal" groups – that is, those that are about equally co-opted and repressed by the political leadership. For example, in some cities, such as Kampala, urban youth are offered various perks and handouts if they cooperate with the regime, but face repression if they attempt to organise oppositionally (Muwanga et al., 2020). Schematically, the larger this rectangle, the broader the social foundation and the more inclusive development policy is likely to be. The grey square represents powerful repressed groups, who are by definition "outside the settlement" and also powerless marginal groups, also "outsiders". Note that powerless groups can be aligned with a country's political leadership, and even receive some benefits from it, yet still be "outside" the political settlement. This is so by definition, since the settlement does not depend on their agreement.

[5] Political settlements analysis to date has largely been funded and used by development partners. However, ESID research in domains such as women's rights found that social movements used similar frameworks to devise strategies that would enable them to successfully navigate particular configurations of power (Nazneen et al., 2019), which suggests that PSA could be used by all groups with an interest in reform and change.

[6] In ESID's political settlements survey we looked at how leaders and followers were incorporated into or under political settlements. Strategies included: violent or non-violent repression; clientelistic material and non-material cooptation; programmatic material legitimation; universalistic ideological legitimation; procedurally democratic legitimation. Other strategies for incorporation, for example "lying and manipulation", could conceivably be added.

**Figure 1: Powerful and powerless, insider and outsider groups in a settlement**




The social foundations dimension of political settlements analysis helps overcome some of the criticisms that have been made of it, with regards to it allegedly being elitist, gender blind and overly conservative. As demonstrated by ESID work on gender equity, none of those need necessarily be so. For Nazneen et al. (2019), the focus on relations of power within political settlements analysis resonates strongly with feminist understandings of how institutions are forged and operate to suit the interests of certain groups over others. The concept of the social foundation makes the gendered nature of power more visible and salient. ESID's political settlements dataset, for example, explicitly codes powerful and powerless groups by gender as well as other social identities (see Schultz and Kelsall, 2021). We are therefore confident that the form of political settlements analysis to be deployed within ACRC will help to uncover the ways in which persistent inequalities of power along gendered (and other social) dimensions become entrenched within particular political and institutional contexts, and show how this shapes the particular patterns of inequality and exclusion that characterise critical problems within African cities. By the same token, our analysis of the social foundation provides a window on "bottom-up" politics and collective action from below, or else the lack thereof, that might be pertinent to understanding urban development outcomes.

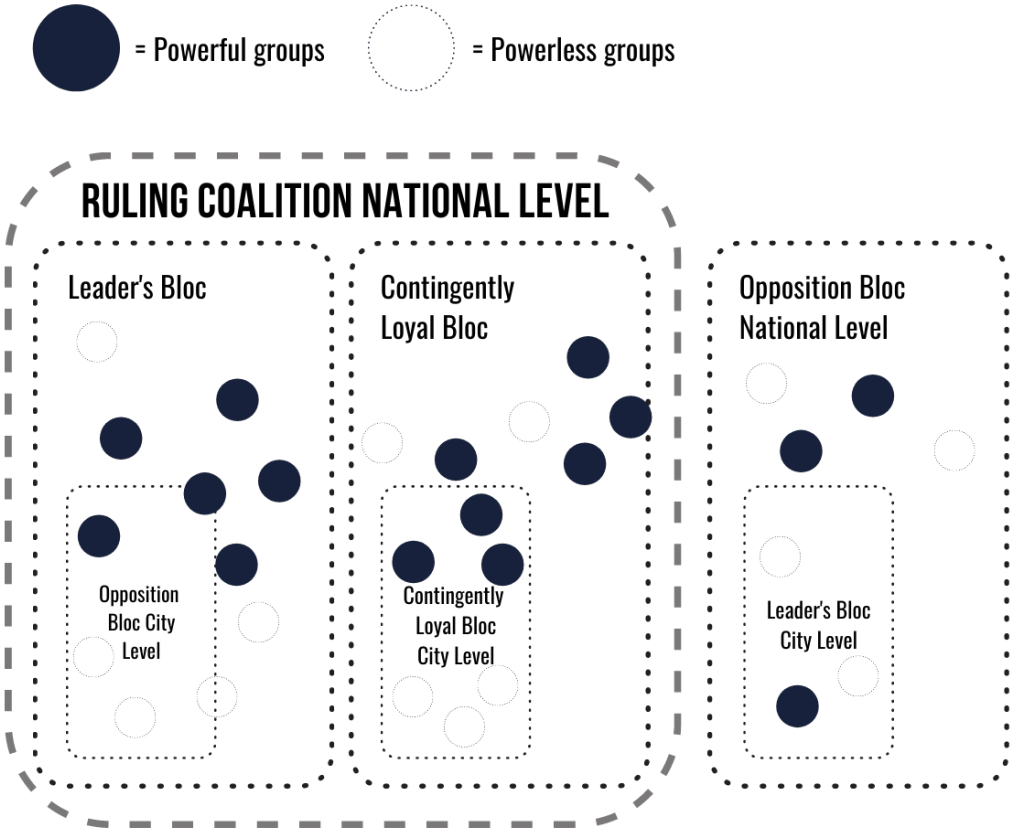
### *2.3.2. The power configuration*

When it comes to power configuration, we can analyse a society's settlement in terms of how much de facto power is wielded by the country's top leader or leaders. Power concentration is calculated by measuring the relative strength of three analytical blocs: a) groups that are loyal to the leader, at least in the short term; b) groups that are only contingently loyal; and c) groups that oppose the leader, or else are disengaged from politics. These categories can also be applied to "within-city" power blocs relative to the

city's de facto leader. Where a) is strong relative to b) and c), power is said to be concentrated.[7]

These blocs, as well as one potential variant of their relationship to political coalitions in the city, are represented in Figure 2 below. In other variants, city-level power blocs may align perfectly with national power blocs, or, in a more complicated case, city power blocs may cross-cut national power blocs.

**Figure 2: Political settlement tri-bloc structure**




Concentrated power configurations have a variety of advantages when it comes to building state capability for development: leaders, feeling relatively secure, can afford to take the long view and, being relatively strong, they can impose their choices on "spoilers" inside the administration and beyond. That does not mean that concentrated configurations are always good for development; in fact, they can make disastrous choices, but the potential to make and implement long-term policy and plans is typically there. Concentrated configurations are likely to have particular impacts on the larger

[7] A full explication of our method can be found via Schulz and Kelsall (2021). Note that power concentration is often associated with autocracy but that is not always the case. ESID's political settlements survey has revealed concentrated power democracies and dispersed power autocracies.

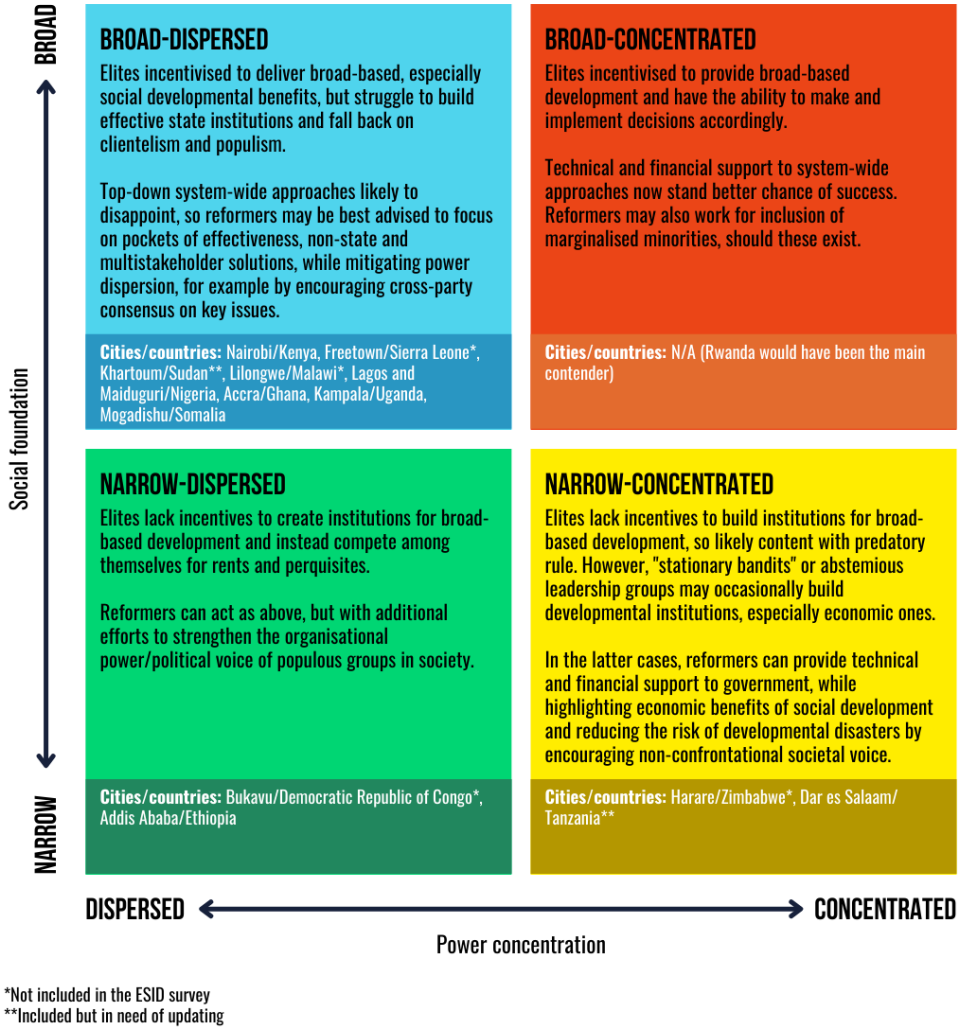
cities that we will generally focus on within ACRC; as ESID work has shown, gaining and maintaining dominance within the increasingly urbanised context of sub-Saharan Africa requires that strategies of incorporation and repression are deployed with particular vigour in major cities (Goodfellow and Jackman, 2020; also see Muwanga, Mukwaya and Goodfellow, 2020; Gebremariam, 2020; Hinfelaar, Resnick and Sishuwa, 2020). Where, by contrast, leaders are weak, politics is a more messy and uncertain process of bargaining, negotiation and struggle. The results will not inevitably be worse and the processes through which they emerge may have greater legitimacy. Importantly for ACRC, there is growing evidence that the active involvement of civil society in negotiating processes of urban reform can be critical in ensuring that the state's response to urban poverty is based more on compromise than on cooptation, and has greater legitimacy and relevance as a result (Burra, Mitlin, Menon et al., 2018; King and Kasaija, 2018). African cities will still be vital battlegrounds for political elites, particularly where they swing between different parties, as in Ghana's capital city Accra, but the strategies for incorporating urban groups where power is dispersed are likely to be different and less repressive and the space for civil society involvement greater.

The key point here is that development occurs through different pathways in different settlement types. The 2x2 matrix in Figure 3 summarises some of the main characteristics of political settlement type for development partners and reformers. Based on a provisional coding of countries, Figure 3 shows that our ACRC cities are in countries that span three of the four possible types of political settlement.

Note that the presence of a political settlement does not imply a complete end to violence; nor does it imply that there is a broad social consensus on the basic political and economic rules of the game. More often than not, settlements are imposed by stronger groups on weaker ones, which in turn means that certain forms of violence are actually intrinsic to maintaining some settlement types, as previous work by consortium members has found in Nairobi (Mwau et al., 2020).[8] For a settlement to exist, all that is implied is that the level of violence and disruption is not sufficient to seriously threaten the existing leadership and its rules of the game. That being said, ESID has developed various terms and empirical cut-off points for determining whether a country is "settled", "unsettled", or has a settlement that is "challenged" or "transitional". Some of our countries, such as Somalia, are likely to fall outside the "settled" category.[9]

[8] pubs.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/10876IIED.pdf (accessed 10 August 2021).
[9] www.effective-states.org/wp-content/uploads/esid_wp_165_codebook.pdf (accessed 10 August 2021).

**Figure 3: A political settlements typology**




*Not included in the ESID survey
**Included but in need of updating

Note also that political settlements are far from static. Their evolution tends to be characterised by processes of punctuated equilibrium – often associated with significant shifts in the level of power concentration and/or nature of the social foundation – and knowing whether one is at a punctuation or equilibrium point will be useful when initiating a programme of reform.

Finally, and although political settlements analysis provides a mapping of all social groups in the city, both powerful and powerless, it is conceivable that some urban development struggles will be played out mainly among groups that PSA codes as “powerless”, that is, groups that are unable realistically to influence the political settlement. Nonetheless, such groups may be able to influence the course of local-level struggles and, also, through forming coalitions with other actors and taking advantages of shifting political settlement dynamics, play an important role in securing more

significant urban reforms, as indicated in the example of informal settlement upgrading in Nairobi discussed below.

### *2.3.3. Illustrations*

In *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*, Richard Sennett (2018) contrasts two progressive models of urban development associated with two iconic left-of-centre urban planners: Jane Jacobs and Lewis Mumford. Jane Jacobs believed that all attempts at urban planning should be bottom-up, building on the energies of local people and not attempting in any way to impose plans on them. To quote:

> "In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), she argued against conceiving of the city as a purely functional system; she asserted that big master-planning inevitably suffocates community; she spoke for mixed neighbourhoods, for informal street life and for local control" (p. 78).

Lewis Mumford agreed with, "the absolute folly of creating a physical structure at the price of destroying the intimate social structure of a community's life" (p. 78). Nevertheless, he argued that:

> "to fight capitalist, top-down power you need a sweeping, countervailing force. More, Mumford thought that people, in order to fight, need to see what an alternative vision of the city might look like […] He believed in design […] Mumford credited the urbanist as central planner with a much greater political virtue than did Jacobs" (p. 79).

Political settlements analysis gives us an angle on these perspectives, for it tells us that even if one agrees with Mumford, you will be fighting an uphill battle to secure compromise unless working in a broad-concentrated settlement. In narrow settlements, central planning is unlikely to work in the interests of low-income and otherwise disadvantaged groups. In dispersed settlements, it is unlikely to be implemented effectively.

Turning to Africa, we identify two examples of how political settlements analysis might be used to help understand in-city problems. Box 1 describes the pre-Magufuli situation in Tanzania, which, since the advent of multiparty democracy, had a broadish, rather dispersed political settlement before becoming narrow and concentrated under Magafuli.

**Box 1: Dar es Salaam: Political settlement and city systems (2005–2015)**

Analysis of Dar es Salaam illustrates the potential of our integrated political settlements and city systems framework to identify both the key problems and potential pathways out of them. The city's climate change resilience and health profile have been weakened by the illegal dumping of solid waste in the city's waterways. This stems from the failure of city-level authorities to provide incentives for private companies to collect waste from low-income neighbourhoods, and it is compounded by a lack of coordination among the numerous agencies responsible for waste collection. Additionally, authorities fail to collect fees and vehicles struggle to access many informal neighbourhoods. Despite the gravity of the problem, there have been only intermittent pressures for change, partly because until recently Tanzania's quasi-competitive national political settlement made national elites dependent on the support of local officials, who extract rents from informal land registration and informal local waste collection initiatives. Any solution to this problem must recognise that the domain-level problems of land, housing, transport, health and waste are intertwined at a systemic level, and address the fact that local officials, who are a powerful force within the national political settlement, have a vested interest in current arrangements.

Our political settlements approach predicts that top-down plans to solve this problem would have been unlikely to have worked in this context, while bottom-up approaches would also have to take seriously the power of this intermediate group. Now that Tanzania has shifted to a more concentrated (and socially narrower) settlement, in which the power of the top leadership appears to have increased relative to lower-level cadres, the chances of top-down reforms being implemented are likely to be higher (though note the aforementioned caveat about the desirability of results).

The story in Box 2 tells us that complex priority problems are nested in domains (in this case, land and informal settlement governance) that are highly politicised because of the ways they are integrated into the wider political settlement. In the Moi era, the Mukuru initiative would probably not have succeeded and reform energies would have been better focused on some other activity, for example, organising politically to create an opening for future reform – as indeed they were (Klopp, 2000). In time, with a broadened political settlement, in which popular areas of Nairobi have come to play a more significant electoral role, opportunities for coalitional action on this issue have improved and compromise has been achieved, with support for upgrading in Mukuru and beyond. The significance of housing for Kenya’s population was further recognised in 2018, when affordable housing was chosen as one of four of presidential pillars. Thus, political settlements analysis injects a degree of realism into urban development, helping us tailor our approach to the dynamics of particular contexts.

**Box 2: Nairobi political settlement dynamics and land development**

Land development in Nairobi has long been critical to political settlement dynamics, with significant benefits for national elites. In the 1980s and 1990s, for example, informal settlements were a key patronage resource for sustaining President Moi's political settlement. Either agents extracted rents from the communities they ostensibly served, or else powerful clients were gifted land, with "slum" residents either evicted or further exploited. Post-2002, when a new political settlement emerged, with a stronger social foundation in Nairobi, political elites sought a more inclusive *modus vivendi* with informal settlements. In 2015, research on living conditions in Mukuru, coproduced by a social movement, international and local universities, coincided with grassroots agitation across Nairobi (Corburn et al., 2017; Lines and Makau 2018). Politicians recognised the significance of this within an increasingly competitive electoral context. In 2017, an informal reform coalition of planners and social movements capitalised on this and persuaded Nairobi County to declare a Special Planning Area for the 105,000 households in the district of Mukuru. This commitment to upgrade the area built on decades of work by academic planners to encourage the municipal officials to incorporate informal settlements into city plans.

## 2.4. Political settlements and ideas

The ESID typology, as explained, focuses on the sociology (social foundation) and geometry (power configuration) of power. However, there are other aspects of political settlements not covered by the typology that may be important to explaining urban problems. One is ideas. Paradigmatic ideas or ideologies – such as "democracy", "modernity", "Islamism", "neoliberalism", "patriarchy", "the right to the city" and so on – anchor, in different times and places, the common understandings that underlie the basic rules of the political and economic game. Meanwhile, a mixture of ideology and evidence will inform the types of urban development problems that are identified as priorities for urban reform and the types of policy ideas that are mobilised to solve them (see Lavers, 2018; Schmidt, 2008). The ideas of powerful actors are entwined with their interests, rather than being free-floating, and can play an important role in binding together different social groups within governing coalitions at national and city level (see below). Where there is a strong alignment between the paradigmatic beliefs and interests of elites, their view of the developmental role of cities and of urban problems, and their preferred policy approaches to these – as with modernist views of urban development that reject the legitimacy of informal settlement dwellers – then these ideas will be particularly difficult for reformers to challenge. Reformers may need to find ways of aligning solutions with paradigmatic ideas or, more ambitiously, consciously mobilising the evidence, ideas and actors required to challenge dominant ideas at each level, as witnessed in several examples of urban reform initiated by civil society actors. Our political settlements approach will be alive to the role of ideas and their potential importance for analysing the reform space around specific complex problems.

## 2.5. Settlements and the city

If the political settlement describes a national-level sociology and geometry of power with systemic features, what is its relation to cities? Many of these issues are touched upon in the ACRC companion paper and annotated bibliography on urban politics in Africa (Goodfellow, Collord and Asante, 2021), but we provide a flavour of some pertinent issues here.

It should be noted at the outset that because most cities are nested within national systems (and conflicts), *it will rarely make sense to describe cities as having their own political settlements*. "City-level political economy", or "city-level power balance", may be better terms, although even these may suggest a somewhat misleading boundedness to city politics. Indeed, the wider urban politics literature has been deeply preoccupied with the problem of multi-level governance, which views cities as nested within local, national and transnational vertical and horizontal networks (Goldsmith, 2012: 134). Some of this scholarship has been concerned with assessing the room for manoeuvre that cities have within these networks, examining how legal and fiscal rules and powers, as well as the access of city-level elites to higher arenas, both constrain and provide opportunities for cities (Kubler and Pagano, 2012: 116; Goldsmith, 2012: 138; Peters and Pierre, 2012: 72). Rhodes, meanwhile, has approached the question of autonomy more dynamically, through a bargaining framework (Goldsmith, 2012: 136–137). In addition to being enmeshed in relations with the centre, city-level governors must also engage with street-level politics; the tradition of writing on "neighbourhood politics" being relevant here (Horak and Blokland, 2012: 267; Klopp and Paller, 2019: 2).

So what is the nature of these national–city elite relations? Cities matter to national political elites in (at least) two important ways. Firstly, cities are arenas where elites mobilise support from city residents for their survival strategies, often, though not always, through clientelistic relationships, where elites offer goods and services (housing, electricity, social transfers, and so on) in a particularistic way to specific groups of residents in exchange for political support (Barry, 2014; Koter, 2013; Paller, 2019, 2020; Resnick, 2014). The social foundations of cities, with their younger and better-educated populations, often leads to them to become centres of political opposition, which can in turn invoke political repression, particularly (as noted above) in more concentrated settlements. Secondly, cities matter to elites as the primary source of rent generation (unless there is a large resource sector in the economy, as in Nigeria) through land speculation, construction contracts and, potentially, goods and services.

At a more granular level, those domains of the city's economy and society that are particularly important to the reproduction of the existing settlement (think of land and rental housing in the example of Moi's Nairobi above) are the areas where the most powerful vested interests are likely to lie. If elites recognise that there are problems

here, they may be productively enrolled in reform efforts; where they are happy with the status quo, the path to reform may be very hard (Klopp and Paller, 2019: 15).

Alternatively, there may be areas that are important from a human development point of view that do not impinge too much on the interests of national or local elites. In these areas, elite commitment to reform may be difficult to encourage, yet relatively unimpeded progress might be made by issue-based coalitions, providing that major investment is not required. Thus, a task of our analysis is to identify the domains and associated systems (see below) that are particularly salient – or not, as the case may be – to the settlement's reproduction and the scope of the reform space associated with them.

To date, political settlements analysis has used the concept of "holding power" to explore the relationship between the national settlement and city-level actors, and in particular the configuration of clientelist relations (Khan, 2010; Goodfellow, 2018). One group or faction has more "holding power" than another when it can "hold out" longer, and thus prevail, in a conflict with the other group. A tentative solution to the problem of understanding the relationship between the settlement and the city, then, is to treat city government as an arena of factional power relations embedded in national political settlement dynamics. Following the ESID approach, city mayors and, where relevant, state governors and other more or less powerful city groups can be characterised by their degree of loyalty or opposition to the national leadership, and their relative strength can be assessed by analysing conflicts or potential conflicts between city-level and national actors and who prevails – a process that will also involve grasping the relationship of city-level leaders to groups below them.

In this respect, our approach will not be too preoccupied by formal institutional relationships, for example, the degree of de jure decentralisation, regime type, or the electoral system. Rather, we will be most interested in de facto power relations, whether channelled through formal or informal institutions. Goodfellow has argued that because African cities are generally weak vis-a-vis the centre, because informal institutions are typically strong, and because cities are far from being self-contained arenas of power, a political settlements approach may be more fruitful for analysing urban problems and power relations (at least in capital cities) than the more city-centric approach of Northern scholars (Goodfellow, 2018).

As discussed above, political settlements analysis draws a distinction between settlements in which power is "concentrated" and those in which it is "dispersed". In practice, it assesses this by assessing the relative strength of the three major political blocs. If the literature on multi-level governance is correct, power *from the point of view of a given city's* elite is likely to be quite dispersed. This is because the city's de facto leader, if indeed there is one, is likely to face a political landscape where there are more powerful players above, multiple powerful players in competing agencies alongside, and possible powerful players below. As well as "multilevel", this has

sometimes been called “polycentric” governance (Dowding and Feiock, 2012: 36). Partly because of this, the “economic, institutional, and political constraints on cities define a rather limited scope of local policy choice” (Peters and Pierre, 2012: 74).

Another concept that we have argued might fruitfully be brought down to the city level is the social foundation, which comprises those powerful groups that can seriously disrupt the settlement and which are treated as “insiders”, coopted by the political leadership. We should note that the social foundation for a city’s ruling elite need not be resident in the city: it might include higher-level political leaders, transnational and national corporations and investors, perhaps diasporic, based outside the city, supra-national government, and so on. However, at least some groups within the city are likely to be politically salient and it will be important to explore how they relate to governing elites at multiple levels of governance. For example, some powerful capitalists may bypass city-level politicians and processes and deal directly with national elites, whilst others may seek to run for office at city level.

In urban regime theory, the significance of various constituencies or organised interests tends to be merged with economic considerations (Sharp and Brown, 2012). Indeed, the urban politics literature has devoted a great deal of attention to the role of business (Peters and Pierre, 2012: 79), as has some past political settlements work (Khan, 2010; Pritchett, Sen and Werker, 2018). Some authors have argued that the privileged position of business, bolstered by ideological support for globalisation and neoliberalism, and entwined also with election funding, reduces the prospects for redistributive social policy (Klopp and Paller, 2019: 8, 9; Clark and Krebs, 2012: 105; Kantor and Turok, 2012: 478). As Goodfellow (2018) notes, however, the incipient nature of capitalist relations in many African cities means that the insights of urban regime theory need to be heavily qualified here.

If formal political systems at the city level tend to get dominated by business and other interests, disadvantaged groups can sometimes get their voices heard through social movements (Mayer and Boudreau, 2012: 274). The rich literature on social movements and other forms of collective action in African cities urban areas has shown how citizens can achieve more inclusive forms of development through a variety of strategies that include contention, collaboration and subversion (Mitlin, 2018).[10] Thinking about social movements through the lens of political settlements analysis, such groups are only likely to take on an “insider” status, to which elites feel habitually impelled to respond, if they can acquire a durable organisational capability, incentivising their incorporation into the social foundation. They may, over shorter periods, achieve policy breakthroughs, but the results are likely to be uncertain or ephemeral.

[10] The forthcoming ACRC companion paper on “Uneven development, politics and governance in urban Africa: An analytical literature review” (Collord, Goodfellow and Asante, 2021), explores the role of civil society and popular agency in African cities in more depth.

It is also interesting to note how unorganised, passive resistance and other, more covert forms of dissent have served to undermine elite projects in cities – a phenomenon that has perhaps best been captured by strands in urban geography, urban sociology and cultural anthropology (Bayat, 2000; Mayer and Boudreau, 2012). Conversely, biopower, technologies of the self, or the lack thereof, help produce certain sorts of subject disposed to act in particular ways within the blocs that comprise the settlement. PSA needs to not be employed too statically if it is to capture these phenomena. These perspectives on power sit uneasily with the more reductionist "power over" approach to holding power that has informed much political settlements analysis to date. ACRC is mindful of this and will explore ways of broadening its conceptualisation of power where appropriate.

This brings us to the topic of coalitions, prominent in political settlements analysis, and also in the study of urban politics. Indeed, coalitional politics seems to be particularly apposite to dispersed power contexts in a changing world, or contexts in which institutions are insufficiently developed to resolve collective action problems, and they have been highly relevant to securing more just urban futures in Africa (see Box 2 above). According to Peters and Pierre,

> "Just as globalization offers both challenges and opportunities to a city, so do policy contexts like climate change, migration, and sustainable development. Urban governance, in this perspective, becomes a process where an eclectic mix of actors, each with their own interest, is mobilized toward a collective goal." (Peters and Pierre, 2012: 82)

Stone echoes the point, noting that:

> "actors in the collective decision process are not only potential rivals, they are also potential allies […] Effective coalitions are not necessarily composed of like-minded members or members with similar value commitments" (Stone, 2012: 18).

Dahl's early and famous study of New Haven showed how Mayor Lee was able to push through his ambitious redevelopment plans where others had failed, with the help of a diverse, yet "muscular" coalition represented by the Citizens Action Commission (CAC) (Dahl, cited in Stone, 2012: 23). But while the CAC was an effective overseer and supporter of a largely externally funded development initiative, when it came to other agendas, it could not help Lee. Stone concludes, "Power is not a generic substance; it is highly situational. It is manifested in the formation of a durable relationship behind a policy direction" (Stone, 2012: 26).

The fluidity of these coalitions might be thought, at first glance, to defy PSA's parsimonious division of the polity into three blocs; yet the tri-bloc approach can arguably help illuminate the success or failure of reform coalitions, the concessions

they end up making, and the extent to which dilution occurs. It can also highlight the way in which urban politics is interwoven with national-level power dynamics, something that was not always highlighted in classic North American urban studies. For example, in Dar es Salaam, plans for an ultra-modernist "New Kigamboni City" (Lindell, Norström and Byerley, 2016), closely associated with President Jakaya Kikwete, were shelved after protests from a coalition spearheaded by local landowners. Most were fairly well-to-do former state and security sector employees, who were not opposed to the project per se, but wanted to ensure that their own interests were represented. Kikwete's bloc was weak at that time, with a strong contingently loyal bloc (of which the coalition was most likely a part) and an opposition bloc that was growing in strength. Reading between the lines in this way, we can explain how the reform episode ultimately played out, with the local landowners' interests prevailing, but no lasting development solution for Kigamboni's non-propertied residents.

## 2.6. Towards a framework for analysis

To conclude, a political settlements analysis of the city must begin by asking a short list of high-level research questions. Specifically:

1. Who are the most powerful groups at national level? How big are they relative to one another? How are they internally configured? How are they aligned? How are they incorporated into or under the political settlement? What joins together or divides these groups? In what sources does their power lie (economic, institutional, coercive, ideological, mobilisational)? What are the governing ideas and rules of the game that sustain or shape these configurations? Is power concentrated or dispersed?

2. Who are the most powerful groups at city level? How big are they relative to one another? How are they internally configured? How are they aligned? What joins together or divides these groups? In what sources does their power lie? What are the governing ideas and rules of the game that sustain or shape these configurations? Is power concentrated or dispersed?

3. How do these groups overlap with or relate to the configuration of powerful groups at national level? To what extent do national political elites hold/manage resources at the city level, and what kinds of resources? Are the same political organisation/s that hold de jure power at the national level also formally in power at the city level? Are there powerful groups nationally that are excluded from accessing power and resources at the city level? Are there powerful groups at the city level excluded from accessing power and resources at the national level?

4. Which groups in the city are relatively powerless? How big are they relative to one another? How are they internally configured? How are they aligned vis-a-vis powerful and other powerless groups? What joins together or divides these

groups? In what sources does their powerlessness lie? What are the governing ideas and rules of the game that sustain or shape these configurations?

5. What are the connections between the configuration of powerful and powerless groups in the city, the interests that unite and divide them, the configuration of infrastructural, economic or technical systems (see Section 3), the relationship to multi-level governance, and the complex priority problems with which they are entwined?

Importantly, each of these questions also needs to be asked spatially, with the constellation of powerful and powerless groups mapped onto the geography of the city.[11]

## 3. From cities as systems to cities of systems

The promise and pitfalls of urban development in Africa are strongly influenced by the extent to which the particular systems responsible for managing resource flows and delivering services within African cities are capable of operating in a manner that is both effective and can deliver equitable and sustainable outcomes. Too often, the daily reality of African cities is characterised by the failure of systems to offer affordable transport or high-quality healthcare, for example, or by how the poor integration of systems leads to failures of both performance and of accountability to users. Scholars in the fields of ecological economics, cybernetics, spatial planning and ecology have conceived of cities as complex, dynamic, human-dominated systems with metabolic properties (see Swyngedouw, 2006; Grimm et al., 2008; Ernstson et al., 2010; Broto, Allen and Rapoport, 2012; Batty, 2013; Newell and Cousins, 2015; Kennedy et al., 2015). By approaching cities as systems, scholars have been able to evaluate and compare their use of energy and other resources, and this has informed interventions aimed at enhancing efficiency and sustainability. However, critics have charged that this approach risks naturalising their contingent characteristics (for example, social and economic inequality) (Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw, 2006), and obscuring their actual ecosystems of cities (Golubiewski, 2012).

### 3.1. Understanding cities as systems

The current conceptualisation of cities as systems tends to focus on the flows and uses of energy and resources. All cities are sustained by energy and resources from elsewhere, whose consumption generates waste which must be processed in situ or distributed to places with a higher absorptive capacity. This has led scholars to conceive of cities as dynamic human-dominated systems with metabolic properties (Ferrão and Fernández, 2013). In his influential text, *The New Science of Cities*, Michael Batty (2013: xviii) asserts that his

[11] The broad questions identified here and after each section below have been used to generate a “city study guidance note” that operationalises our approach and will be deployed in our city-based studies.

> "perspective is thus unashamedly about the physical and spatial artefacts that define our cities. The tools I will introduce that underpin the new science … are manifestly physical and spatial in their treatment of systems of cities and cities as systems".

To adherents of this approach, cities comprise the built environment and material inputs and outputs, yet each city has a unique systemic profile. Some cities are "telecoupled" with distant places from which inputs are sourced (for example, Singapore), while other cities draw resources from localised catchments in their immediate hinterlands (Rees, 1992; Seto et al., 2012). Some cities are able to process nearly all the waste they produce (for example, Stockholm), while other cities lack strategies to manage solid waste and its accumulation results in socio-environmental hazards (Zaman and Lehman, 2013; Hoornweg and Bhada-Tata, 2012).

Planners and policymakers can use the "city-as-system" framework to identify key interventions designed to foster a more efficient and sustainable use of resources *as well a*s enhance equitable access to resources and reduce disproportionate exposure to systemic hazards. This requires an understanding of the relationship between urban residents and the materiality of the city. Inputs of resources and energy are termed "flows" and their consumption facilitates social reproduction (for example, charcoal is produced in hinterlands and then transported to the city, where it is used as cooking fuel), and enables economic activity, such as manufacturing and tradeable services, as well as non-tradeable localised economic activity. The consumption of flows generates waste, some of which is absorbed and processed within the city, while the remainder is transported elsewhere. There are a host of strategies used to manage solid waste, such as incineration, landfilling and recycling. When a city generates more waste than it can absorb, the result is typically an environmental hazard, to which disadvantaged communities are often disproportionately exposed (Martinez-Alier, 2003; Bullard, 2008; Auyero and Swistun, 2009). Some flows are channelled into the built environment and stored in the city's "stocks". This includes the energy and resources needed to construct buildings (for example, aggregate and cement used in concrete) and infrastructure such as transport systems (Giampietro, Mayumi and Sorman, 2011; Wang et al., 2018).

This conceptualisation recognises the nested nature of urban settlements. On one hand, cities are embedded within networks that extend across scales, from region to nation-state and beyond.[12] On the other hand, cities are comprised of constituent systems that expedite the movement of particular flows of resources and waste (Kennedy et al., 2015). These sub-systems are commonly conceived as discrete sub-systems in and of themselves (such as water treatment and distribution systems, or electricity generation and distribution), yet they often have dimensions that are

[12] Eurostat provides data on material flows of member states rather than cities: ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/environment/material-flows-and-resource-productivity

interrelated (Frantzeskaki and Loorbach, 2010; Taşkın and Demir, 2020). Some flows can be transferred seamlessly from one sub-system to another, and a change in the volume or composition of flows in one sub-system may impact other sub-systems. For example, the expansion of piped water systems increases the throughput of water and must be accompanied by investment in wastewater treatment or sewerage systems if there are not negative impacts on health and wellbeing. In many cases, interventions, or rapid changes in one system, result in a series of inter-system impacts, not all of which are negative. For example, improvements in electricity distribution may allow factories to extend their operating hours, but this could increase the amount of water used and waste generated. Investments in transportation systems designed to reduce journey times may also improve road safety and relieve healthcare systems (Sharpin et al., 2018). Thus, a single intervention can have wide-ranging positive and negative inter-system impacts, and hence the need to transcend “silo thinking”, identify risks, weigh trade-offs and anticipate far-reaching impacts of interventions (Kennedy, Cuddihy and Engel-Yan, 2007; Pauliuk and Müller, 2014).

Finally, analyses of material flows and stocks have informed policy geared towards more efficient use of resources (Kennedy, Pincetl and Bunje, 2011), the reduction and reuse of outputs (Cousins, 2017; Schindler and Demaria, 2020) and sustainability transitions (Loorbach, Frantzeskaki and Avelino, 2017). Recent scholarship has emphasised the need for interventions to couple environmental sustainability with equitable economic outcomes in pursuit of “just transitions” (Swilling and Annecke, 2012; Newell and Mulvaney, 2013; Swilling, Musango and Wakeford, 2016).

### 3.2. Criticism of cities-as-systems approach

The conceptualisation of cities as systems has faced significant criticism. The three criticisms most relevant to the ACRC are:

1. The concept may be useful for quantitative research that maps flows and stocks, but it does not explain why cities have particular systemic configurations or how they change.
2. There is a risk that systems are naturalised and unequal access to resources or exposure to waste is portrayed as an unalterable technical characteristic rather than the outcome of social and political processes.
3. The concept may be useful for cities in the OECD in which most flows are measurable, but it is inapplicable in developing countries because reliable data is scarce, and many flows and stocks are “informal” and difficult to measure.

These criticisms have merit. Analysis must therefore account for the contingent nature of city systems and show how they have been shaped over time by politics, social relations and struggles, cultural preferences, technical expertise, economic constraints and environmental factors (such as the availability of resources). We will therefore begin by grounding the analysis of each city in historically informed scholarship that identifies the choices, events and geography that have shaped the particular

configuration of their systems. This will account for infrastructural path dependency from the colonial era that, in many instances, has resulted in lock-in that continues to influence access to resources to this day (Dill and Crow, 2014). In Dar es Salaam, for example, public infrastructure systems were largely restricted to a small part of the city where European settlers resided, while very different sub-systems evolved to cater to South Asian merchants and native populations (Burton, 2005; Tripp, 1997). Also important is recognising how some investments in the built environment result in "lock-in" with considerable influence over other systems, particularly those related to the built environment. Some systems are more prone to resulting in lock-in than others – for example, the existence of an expansive road network can hinder the establishment of alternative modes of transport (Frantzeskaki and Loorbach, 2010). Such a road network may encourage dispersed low-density residential developments, with negative consequences for carbon emissions.

The systems of African cities tend to differ from their OECD counterparts in important ways, so research methods and theoretical assumptions must be adapted accordingly. Most urban planners embrace the "modern infrastructural ideal", in which citywide systems provide near-universal access to resources and services (Coutard and Rutherford, 2015). The basic unit in this ideal type is the single-family dwelling, which serves as the interface between individual residents and material flows (such as access to water and disposal of solid waste). Most African cities do not conform to this ideal with, for example, multi-family occupancy in rental units on a single plot, and in this context their systems tend to be characterized by fragmentation and heterogeneity (Graham and Marvin, 2001; Myers, 2011; Schindler, 2017; Lawhon et al., 2018; Bhan, 2019; Van Noorloos et al., 2020). In many instances there are multiple overlapping segments of systems dedicated to the movement of particular flows, which vary in their degree of formality and ownership (see Table 1). For some years, a host of decentralised, experimental and frugal innovations that challenge the "modern infrastructural ideal" have been developed by citizens and states, and rolled out in cities across Africa. For example, micro-lending to facilitate the distribution of photovoltaic (PV) solar panels and pay-as-you-go cooking gas delivery systems (Leliveld and Knorringa, 2018; Guma, 2019; Chambers and Evans, 2020; Grimm et al., 2020), and water kiosks (Mitlin et al. 2018). Furthermore, the single-family dwelling

**Table 1: Making sense of complex, fragmented and hybrid systems in African cities**

| | **Public** | **Private** |
|---|---|---|
| **Formal** | Publicly owned and operated utilities | Companies that offer infrastructural solutions |
| **Informal** | Moonlighting officials and administrators channel flows from | Informal providers of resources (for example, water delivery or electricity in informal settlements) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | formal public systems into informal distribution networks | |

does not always serve as the interface of residents and city systems and, in some cases, neighbourhoods are their basic unit (for example, water kiosks or solid waste depots) (Asase et al., 2009; Adams, Sambu and Smiley, 2019; Schindler, Nguyen and Barongo, 2019; Alba, Kooy and Bruns, 2020).

Categories such as formal/informal and public/private provide a helpful indication of a system's configuration, but actual systems exhibit diversity and complexity that defy straightforward classification. Thus, both axes in Table 1 should be understood as sliding scales, rather than rigid dichotomies – the four classifications are merely ideal types – and the table should be used as a heuristic tool that provides a measure of analytical clarity, rather than a comprehensive framework that can capture the diversity of all systems. For example, in some cases, public utilities knowingly channel electricity to intermediaries, who sell it informally in informal settlements. Should this practice be classified as public-informal or private-informal? In one case, the intermediaries use state-of-the-art electricity meters purchased from Alibaba and shipped directly from China, so while their activity is technically illegal and unrecognised by the state, the practice of electricity distribution is institutionalised, highly organised and the infrastructure employed has a formal appearance. Elsewhere, informal settlements are integrated with some formal systems – they may, for example, not conform to building regulations, yet have police stations that are staffed by the local police force (Mwau, Sverdlik and Makau, 2020). The precise manifestation of specific systems is animated by the (in)formal institutions of particular political settlements – the more broadly based political economy within which they are located.

Many of the systems noted above are primarily material and dependent on a significant level of (often theoretical) coordination, typically from the state, which includes the establishment of rules, regulations, standards and capital investment. Many of these systems are public, and operate with public oversight, even if they have largely been privatised. Again, these *primarily material systems with significant state authority* include water provision, sanitation, drainage, energy, waste management, transport and roads. All these systems include substantive informal activities, despite being formally governed within official structures of municipal and national governance. Cities are also composed of social systems designed to provide services. Some of these are highly regulated and involve significant state authority, albeit alongside informal service providers, such as education, health, policing and law. Other service systems are less regulated, or less effectively regulated, such as food distribution, transportation and finance. In some cities, election systems are subject to elaborate regulations, which are often not applied in practice.

One way we will attempt to make sense of this complexity and variation is to focus on the political economy and politics that shape systems of cities. The conceptual

framework of political settlements will provide an entry into this study. A multiscalar analysis that includes both citywide systems and domains will help to uncover new insights into both the political economy of the city and the ways in which systems function, integrate and fragment, and how systems can be improved.

### 3.3. Accounting for contingency and politics

A city's systemic profile is contingent and shaped by political and technical choices that have been made by key stakeholders (for example, to either incinerate solid waste or inter it in a landfill), availability of resources, and demands from residents for infrastructure, resources and services. Thus, the evolution of a city's systemic profile is driven by social relations and political contestations that operate at multiple levels (for example, at the neighbourhood and city levels, as well as the national and international scales) and in relation to particular domains that incorporate multiple systems (see below).

Political confrontations are common when the volume or composition of flows changes suddenly. The most obvious example is when infrastructure breaks down and flows of resources are disrupted or waste accumulates. In these cases, residents tend to try and alter their relationship with sub-systems with a sense of urgency (Silver, 2014; Ramakrishnan, O'Reilly and Budds, 2020; Lemanski, 2020). However, investments in infrastructure can also result in the reduction or redirection of throughput and trigger conflict. For example, the construction of an incinerator can reduce the volume of waste that reaches landfills, which can lead to conflict among stakeholders competing for recyclable material (Samson, 2009; Demaria and Schindler, 2016; Gutberlet, 2021). Indeed, conflict tends to erupt when a powerful interest group's control over a specific system is challenged. For example, researchers have recently drawn attention to the existence in some cities of "sand mafias", who enjoy an informal monopoly over the sale of sand that is used as aggregate to make concrete, and inhibit construction firms from sourcing cheaper or higher-quality aggregate (Torres et al., 2017). The extent to which political contestation erupts depends on the relative power of groups that control the affected systems. Interest groups may seek to disrupt interventions that would alter systems in such a way that they would be unable to access resources or rents, while systemic transformation may result in a realignment of interest groups and a reordering of their status within the broader political settlement.

An account of urban processes in African cities requires a deep understanding of the key stakeholders within political settlements and the mechanisms they use – which are often informal – to extract rent through their control over city-based systems and strengthen their hold over power and/or the means of economic accumulation. Indeed, ownership and control over systems, and claims to the revenue and rents they generate, are contested by a range of stakeholders, such as public-sector authorities, private-sector entrepreneurs, community-based organisations and informal interest groups. These dynamics are not limited to material systems – they also apply to social systems and production (both export-oriented and neighbourhood-based). Interest

groups that control systems must not only respond to these political challenges, but must also maintain systems and reduce risk in the face of endogenous and exogenous shocks and stresses (Dodman et al., 2017). Thus, in the case of publicly funded systems, planners and politicians are expected to justify the choice of technology, the mode of delivery (for example, private vs public sectors) and the geographical distribution of investments. In practice, infrastructure is often informally controlled by rent-seeking interest groups whose power lies in their ability to mediate access/exposure to flows. While this control is routinely challenged, complex (in)formal institutions and agreements among interest groups provide a modicum of predictability.

Systems are also subject to competing demands "from below", and their configuration structures, and are in turn shaped by the engagement of users. There is a near-universal tendency for people to try and strengthen or safeguard their access to flows of resources that enable social reproduction (such as water, food and energy), and reduce their exposure to environmental hazards (such as wastewater, faecal sludge and municipal solid waste) (Schindler, 2017).[13] City residents who share a relationship to particular flows may identify collectively and advance claims (Paller, 2020). For example, residents may develop complex strategies to engage food distribution, energy and water systems that involve accessing the same resource from multiple sources (Lawhon et al., 2018). In the case of water, for example, strategies may include accessing formal piped water (either legally or surreptitiously), purchasing a small amount of bottled water for drinking, and fashioning home-based infrastructure upgrades to harvest rainwater or extract groundwater (Schramm and Ibrahim, 2021; Beard and Mitlin, 2021). These complex strategies, in which residents access systems at various points, serve to mitigate risk. For instance, the disruption of formal transport services due to mass strikes would lead to an increase in the use of informal systems, and conversely, the disruption of informal arrangements can force the government to take responsibility and expand the coverage of formal systems (Goodfellow, 2017).

Systems within cities are subject to exogenous shocks and stresses, that can originate in immediate hinterlands or in places around the world with which cities are telecoupled (Dodman et al., 2017; Bai et al., 2018). Indeed, political upheaval, social unrest, economic crisis and environmental catastrophe can reverberate in cities around the world. Most recently, Covid-19 demonstrated how quickly localised epidemics can become global pandemics and in addition to its impacts on health, the prolonged interruption of supply and demand for many goods heralds a looming global economic crisis. City-based interest groups seek to limit their exposure to exogenous risks, but as Covid-19 demonstrates, it is impossible to mitigate risk completely (De Groot and Lemanski, 2020). Many economic, social, environmental and political shocks and stresses constitute push factors that increase rural-to-urban migration. City systems therefore must be adaptable enough to accommodate increased demand from rural

[13] There are exceptions, such as informal-sector waste collectors, whose livelihoods depend on access to flows of discarded recyclable material, and those making compost from faecal sludge.

migrants (or reduced demand from urban citizens returning to rural areas), sometimes at very short notice, as a result of conflict or natural disasters, and/or for brief periods (for example, daily commuters and seasonal migrants).

In summary, a range of factors establish the parameters of possible configurations of systems. In addition to political settlements, such factors include geography, the availability of resources, lock-in, path dependencies, citizen agency and protest, as well as exogenous influences. Additionally, systems are shaped by practices, both governance and organisation "from above", and "from below" by users who seek to access and maintain systems. Debates and discourse can be reframed in ways that "bundle" important issues that do not attract significant political support together with more visible and emotive issues. For example, road safety is a major issue in many African cities, yet improvements in the efficiency of transportation systems tend to be prioritised instead (Sharpin and Harris, 2018). There is scope to bundle these issues together in a single intervention, and forge an alliance among a range of stakeholders. Our political settlements and domain-level analysis will allow us to anticipate the prospects for successful alliances, and show how particular systems are shaped by these relations of social and political power. By recognising the contingent nature of systems and understanding extant social and political relations that shape them, it is possible to identify the interplay among systems and anticipate the likelihood that an intervention will result in intersystem impacts or provoke a conflict.

### 3.4. Expanding the field of analysis: From cities as systems to cities of systems

As noted above, most scholarship that conceptualises cites as systems is focused on materiality. We plan to include social systems, such as education, healthcare, finance, political participation, neighbourhood economies and media. These systems shape cities and contribute to wellbeing – and it is impossible to imagine desirable urban futures without them. We therefore approach cities as a series of material *and* social systems that are drawn together and interrelated in certain domains (see below). Core systems that are integrated into numerous domains will be profiled in all cities, and include:

- water
- energy
- waste management
- sanitation
- education
- healthcare
- food distribution
- transportation
- finance
- law and order.[14]

[14] In addition to profiles of the core systems, some systems will be of paramount importance for some cities and not others. For example, cities that experience heavy seasonal rainfall will most

Profiles of core systems will be compiled in each city and will include the following characteristics:

*Coverage:* The "modern infrastructural ideal" envisions formal citywide systems, yet formal infrastructure systems often cover very limited geographical areas. The analysis of domains requires an understanding of the actual state and coverage of systems, and the extent to which they are fragmented and overlap.

*Ownership and governance:* The privatisation of publicly owned city systems in the late 20th century has led to complex ownership structures, in which both public and private entities control a stake. Corporatisation of utilities, at both the national and city scales, has sought to reduce political influence but may have exacerbated silo thinking and led to regulatory challenges. Both trends have led to negotiations surrounding the distribution of risk, responsibility and revenue. Furthermore, this field will highlight the modes of governance through which systems are produced, managed and maintained. In some cases, this is done collectively at the scale of the neighbourhood, while other systems are controlled and operated by powerful interest groups at a distance or are centralised and managed within the city by central government authorities.

*Organisation:* A proliferation of informal systems have emerged in response to the inability of formal systems to keep pace with urbanisation. Some informal systems are auto-constructed in increments, while others appear formal and may even be more technologically advanced than their formal-sector counterparts. Some informal systems are integrated into formal delivery, while in other cases there is little coordination.

*Access:* Systems can be located on a scale in terms of their openness. In extreme cases, barriers ensure only elites have access, while the opposite extreme is universal and equal access. For systems whose access is determined by market forces, this field will focus on affordability.

*Quality:* This is specifically for systems that are meant to provide a service or material flow. For example, education and water systems are routinely assessed for their quality.

*History and record of contestation:* Systems evolve over time, and changes are often closely linked with contestation (for example, new interest groups can seize control over rents during privatisation, systems can be rescaled and (de-)centralised). This field will describe important events and interventions, and identify the stakeholders that act as gatekeepers and capture rent.

*Relationship with political settlement:* Many systems will have a direct relationship with the political settlement, while others will not. Characterising a system's relationship with a country's political settlement will allow for contestation to be anticipated and pre-

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likely have wastewater management systems designed to prevent flooding. These systems will be less relevant in cities in arid climates with little rainfall. Thus, systems that feature in a number of domains in a given city can be included on an *ad hoc* basis, as needed.

empted. Some systems will help generate more rents and/or legitimacy for elites than others. In some instances, stakeholders wield power over systems due to their position within political settlements, while, in other cases, those with power over flows can intrude upon existing settlements. Finally, some fierce localised political contestations surrounding city systems may not be directly related to political settlements.

*Connections with other systems:* All systems are interrelated with some other systems, and this field will identify noteworthy intersystem connections. Particular intersystem connections will be highlighted if residents identify them as problematic. For example, if residents complain that solid waste routinely clogs drains, and this results in stagnant water that poses a health hazard, the field will capture the interface between solid waste management and wastewater. Alternatively, this field will highlight anomalous connections that may be the result of lock-in, events or institutions.

*Risk:* Systems exhibit varying levels of durability and vulnerability to shocks and stresses which can be local or exogenous. Researchers will identify the risks that shaped systems and those that threaten their functioning. Furthermore, researchers will explain how city residents adapted in cases where shocks or stresses disrupted systems. For example, if formal public transport systems were disrupted, did people use informal systems?

These characteristics determine how systems are interrelated and shape domains. As we discuss below, domains are fields of action that bring together stakeholders to "intervene through policy and programmes and practices to change outcomes in cities". They emerge through the identification of needs and demands from multilateral development institutions, domestic elites, politicians, civil-society organisations and urban residents, and from their practices. Domains draw together multiple systems into epistemic fields. These fields incorporate system-based experts into epistemic communities. For example, housing is a domain that incorporates a number of systems, such as water, electricity and transportation, in addition to social systems, such as planning, participation and grassroots organisation. In addition to being drawn into the domain of housing, all of these systems are drawn into other domains as well. For example, housing and industry are separate domains, and they each incorporate – and at times compete for – systems like water and electricity. Analysis that shows how these systems are incorporated into multiple domains can inform interventions and help stakeholders anticipate, assess and monitor their impacts.

### *3.4.1. Understanding cities as systems*

Understanding cities as complex systems offers the potential to identify needs, plan interventions, and anticipate/evaluate impacts in a more holistic way that recognises the intensely interrelated character of cities and their constituent parts. We seek to emphasise the contingent nature of city systems and account for social, economic and political systems as well, as it is difficult to imagine desirable urban futures without them. Analysis must account for the fragmented, informal and unequal nature of these systems in many African cities. Thus, we conceive of cities as a collection of systems, and we begin by establishing profiles of core material and social systems in particular

cities. These system profiles inform our analysis of domains, and condition how we approach complex priority problems.

Finally, we will also seek to account for regional and global contexts, exogenous shocks and stresses, and extra-local institutions and actors that shape events and systems of cities. It is difficult to systematise the inclusion of these factors, given their variation and the variegated nature in which they impact cities and unfold within them. Again, Covid-19 serves as an illustrative example, because although it is truly global, its impacts are unevenly distributed among and within cities. Some international institutions and international non-governmental organisations may play a major role in shaping the systems of some cities, while their presence may be less influential in others. Similarly, China's political and economic engagement with many African countries has increased in recent years and Chinese firms built more than 30% of Africa's large-scale infrastructure (Deloitte, 2019). China's impact is not manifested uniformly across the continent, however, so precise analysis must acknowledge the specific influence of Chinese and other extra-local stakeholders in particular cities. In some cases, the analysis will account for a direct shock (such as political upheaval that results in forced migration to a city), while in other instances city-based stakeholders will seek to mitigate their exposure to exogenous risks and thereby alter particular systems. Thus, a systematic approach to exogenous influence is difficult to establish, given its variation, and it is important to acknowledge that cities are not hermetically sealed. Analysis must account for the specific ways that extra-local stakeholders, contexts and events influence city systems and political settlements.

## 4. Urban development domains

### 4.1. What are urban development domains?

U*rban development domains* can be defined as fields of power, policy and practice that are relevant to the solution of particular problems and/or to advancing specific opportunities in relation to cities.  Domains are constituted by actors (political, bureaucratic, professional and popular) that seek to claim control, influence and rights over a particular field, such as housing or the contribution of cities to national development, through various means. Urban development domains also include multiple city systems and it is the interaction between these systems can define the nature and level of development achieved within a given domain, as with the entwined contribution that systems of energy, water and sanitation and transportation make to the domain of housing. Domain actors compete in part over the multiple systems that shape how relevant stocks, flows, and goods and services move through and operate within a specific domain, and how these allocate costs and benefits related to the domain to different social groups. Urban development domains may also play particular roles in sustaining the wider balance of power at both city and national level, providing rents, controlling electorates and/or providing legitimacy to governing elites in ways that in turn shape the ways in which authority is contested within domains, and whose

interests and ideas predominate. The objectives of urban development domains are part of what is contested.[15]

A particular feature of urban development domains, and policy domains more broadly, concerns the role of epistemic communities, defined as: "... a network of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area" (Haas, 1992). Domain-level actors draw on and further strengthen epistemic communities to expound particular ideas, build strategic alliances/coalitions to achieve strategic objectives, and undertake direct activism, policy reform, new programming approaches and reformulated practices to solve problems and advance opportunities. Such epistemic communities reach beyond national borders, linking those aspiring to change local outcomes with changing professional approaches, new academic insights and wider ideologies to engage with. Epistemic communities are particularly important in validating ideas and shaping which ones get to be considered, debated and potentially accepted. Within urban development, the relevance of gentrification for informal settlement upgrading processes in African cities (John et al., 2020) is one example of an active debate around a particular domain. Meanwhile, the potential of coproducing services across formal and informal service providers is an example of an idea that appears to be more widely accepted across a growing number of domains (Watson, 2014). More narrowly conceptualised systems expertise is subsumed within relevant domains as actors come together in areas of mutual concern.

Domains are highly political because they involve the validation of specific forms of intervention and their direction of travel. Expertise is central to this process and what is legitimated by the expertise within domains potentially affects elite interests in multiple ways. For example, through the distribution of rents, their ability to secure the support of electorates and/or the ways in which investments promote ideas and ideologies used by the ruling regime to secure support. Expertise – and the urban professions – are influential in governing urban spaces, with specific forms of expertise emerging to address state needs to manage state activities and urban populations. Both Escobar (1992) and Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) discuss the emergence of "urban" professions under modern capitalism to both manage populations and place. Hence expertise, and the epistemic communities which frame issues and debates, are integral to the nature

[15] There are links between our notion of domains and the idea of a "politically informed multi-sectoral approach". However, we prefer the term "domain" because of the attention it draws to issues of power and authority, being defined as "a particular field of thought, activity, or interest, especially one over which someone has control, influence, or rights" (Collins Dictionary: www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/domain) and as "an area of interest or an area over which a person has control" (Cambridge Dictionary: www.dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/domain). According to our understanding, sectors are more technical constructs that overlap closely with systems. We prefer the term "system", as we believe it offers greater analytical potential to improve outcomes through the way in which it emphasises interconnectedness between different components and also highlights the need to think about multiple scales, moving from the house to neighbourhood and city, with potential linkages beyond the city boundaries.

of state authority in the urban context within capitalist economies. As significantly, domain expertise influences processes of recognition and redistribution. Ideas about who is entitled to participate in, and benefit from, interventions in domains influence outcomes. Changes in understandings about the scale and nature of the informal economic sector, for example, have led to greater willingness on the part of some authorities to provide day licences for street traders (Brown 2006). Greater recognition of the needs of specific groups, such as people with disabilities, has led to changes in the design of the built environment (even if this remains on a very small scale), and a greater discourse about the lack of opportunities for disadvantaged groups to influence the understandings of epistemic communities that influence urban development domains. The growth of participatory budgeting has been influential in challenging ideas about who is entitled to take part in discussions about state-financed urban investment (Cabannes, 2014). Domains are therefore significant for the reinforcement of patterns of economic, spatial and political (in)justice.

However, we recognise that domain-sanctioned interventions may be counterhegemonic. Domain approaches may strengthen social relations that support the ability to understand alternative solutions and/or build networks that are better able to contest power – for example, water management committees tasked with running water kiosks in informal settlements that are networked together to understand citywide constraints to their effective operation (Adams and Boateng, 2018). Domain approaches may adversely affect the distribution of resources for elites with, for example, the demolition of illegally constructed buildings. Collective action on the part of those excluded from and/or adversely affected by domain-related processes may challenge the way in which domains function, and lead to reforms. For example, resistance to the demolition of informal settlements has encouraged the growth of informal settlement upgrading in at least some locations (Lines and Makau, 2018) and organisations of informal workers have challenged both market-based processes of exploitation and state policies and programmes. Hence domains are sites of contestation between actors with different interests and ideas and different levels of holding power within the broader political settlement.

Urban development domains are also subject to various forms and levels of governance, in relation to national, sub-national and also system-level systems of authority. Most domains will be at least partially governed by city authorities, but frequently also other government agencies and delegated authorities that overlap with city governments (regional development agencies, national ministries, utilities, etc.). Changes in domain ideas and the location of domain governance over time reflect changes in elites and elite associated ideas and practices. Hence the shift from planning practices that favour large, well-located plots for colonial administrators and dense, informal areas that provide accommodation for many African urban residents – and which were ignored on maps and formal documents – to discussions about more equitable urban planning approaches to the built environment and increasing concerns about the climate implications of urban design, form and structure.

Within this framework, urban development domains are a construct to enable us to transcend sector- and systems-based thinking, recognising existing epistemic communities and their limitations, and prepare to address priority complex problems. They also help us to see the politics of urban development challenges, which are tied into how particular actors frame problems and mobilise around their solutions. Domains help us analyse outcomes and opportunities across the political economy and city-of-system dimensions of our framework. Addressing housing needs, for example, requires an engagement with those involved in housing delivery, but it also requires the integration of titling (including types of titles that may be required to secure more equitable outcomes), access to essential infrastructure and services, and a system of housing finance to enable costs to be spread over an appropriate period and to ensure that such costs are affordable.

Having established what we mean by domains, we now discuss in more detail the role that they play in our conceptual framework, before then setting out the main urban development domains that we have initially identified as being of particular importance to the complex priority problems facing African cities.

## 4.2. What is the purpose of domains in the ACRC analytical framework?

ACRC's task is to understand how to intervene through policy, programmes and practices to improve inclusive development outcomes in cities.

There is a widespread recognition that urban interventions that are strongly sectoral (or system orientated) tend to fail. Such interventions are too narrowly framed and there is a failure to take into account activities, relations and dynamics (including unintended consequences from second and further-order effects) reaching beyond the boundaries of sectors and their systemic properties. Sectoral interventions fail in urban areas, in particular, because of the interrelationship between goods, services, production and consumption and the high density of institutions that have an overlapping presence on the ground. For example, improved water services are about much more than just laying down pipes and collecting payments. Pipe installation may require regularisation of informal settlements (where between 50% and 90% of urban residents live), and the reblocking of existing dwellings (to enable pipes to be laid). This is particularly complex where land is privately owned. Existing informal providers may block utility provision and this requires approaches that integrate their enterprises with formal providers. Finance is needed by households to pay connection fees. And water can only be safely supplied if there is drainage to remove wastewater from the neighbourhoods, and if sanitation provision is designed to prevent contamination. Experts have recognised the limitations of sectoral and discipline-based thinking in their work and have reached beyond their own boundaries to engage with others who are useful to address problems and opportunities relevant to their work. Hence domains are a term used to capture the way in which actors and the epistemic communities that they belong to are already working to transcend sectors and disciplines in the urban context.

At this stage, we hypothesise that different domains may play different roles in sustaining the configuration of power at national, city and perhaps also sub-city level, in terms of the flow of rents (for example, property, land) and legitimacy (for example, spending on social services and merit goods); they will also play different roles in the control of citizens (including physical restrictions on movements, resource transfers to secure votes, and so on). For example, the domain of neighbourhood economies may offer little by the way of rents to the national elite but may offer important benefits through securing the political support from workers in specific trades (such as informal transport providers (Goodfellow, 2014), or those in informal water services). For city elites, there may be rents if officials and/or those owning land on which there are informal settlements are paid to enable unregulated activities to continue. Powerful individuals within those neighbourhoods may be able to benefit by charging for protection services or simply to enable production and trading activities to carry on. This resource may strengthen their leadership and control over the neighbourhood, and potentially make them attractive to politicians seeking to control electorates.

The extent and ways in which domains perform political roles for powerful interests within the settlement will influence what is possible within them. The way in which the domain is configured (in terms of the balance of power between different actors, and the kinds of knowledge and ideas that are therefore privileged) will suit certain interests and problems, whilst also preventing other problems being resolved in ways that secure more equitable and sustainable forms of development.

Domains will engage in multiple ways with the city systems that flow through and help to constitute them. The relationship between domains and systems will vary significantly between and within different contexts, including in relation to the responsibilities devolved to the city with regards to specific systems. In some cases, national government may also be significant providers of services relevant to that domain; for example, housing finance regimes are likely to be a national responsibility. The relationship will also differ depending on the political orientation of the state and/or city government, and its priorities. It is likely, then, that domain-level actors will have to engage with systems and their governance at both city and national levels. Domains will also help us understand and prepare for the need for interventions to recognise the need for a diverse and multiscalar response. Hence, for example, economic opportunities are significantly different in peri-urban lower-density neighbourhoods than in inner city areas. At the same time, regardless of where they are located, the ability of micro-enterprises to thrive is related to the size of their market, which is related both to infrastructure within the neighbourhood and to connections beyond the neighbourhood, including aspects such as trading relations and transport services.

Effectively framed, our domains will nest our priority complex problems, helping work to advance on addressing priority complex problems in cities. As we move from research on urban problems to action research to address those problems, in the next phase of

ACRC's work, then knowledge of domains, and established relations with domain actors, will help to generate higher quality solutions to the priority complex problems, and the uptake activities around these solutions. Understanding the way that the domain functions and the nature of domain discussions will, for example, help us to understand: alternative ways of addressing priority complex problems; how credible alternative approaches are and to whom they are credible; the political significance of the domain to the elite; and the language and symbolism used in that domain. This knowledge will also help researchers to frame their work in a way that increases the likelihood of take-up elsewhere.

Domain boundaries are dynamic and permeable and may shift in response to factors that are exogenous to our framework, for example:

- Events happen. Activities and interactions within domains are influenced by macro-economic policies, migration shifts, environmental and other crises that may reshape the nature and size of flows and stocks that enable economic activity and social reproduction within cities.
- Societal change. Structural shifts are present (in addition to the influence of one-off events); for example, changing meanings to ethnic identities, changes to ethnic-specific activities, and processes of class formation and women's empowerment.
- Cities exist within larger spatial areas, and they are partially and loosely bounded entities. Hence there are goods, services, finance, people, and environmental impacts that flow between cities and their peri-urban areas and rural hinterlands. Factors outside of the city can change domain interactions and outcomes.

Such factors mean that the domains are likely to be broadly similar in different locations but not identical.

Domains studied in different locations have to be sufficiently consistent for comparative analysis, while flexible for local relevance. We need to investigate the same types of domain across several different cities in order to be relevant to those policy audiences that operate across countries, whilst at the same time recognising the important contextual differences at play, in order to remain relevant to specific city- and national-level policy communities. For example, housing markets in Nairobi and Mogadishu are very different. In Nairobi, land holdings are concentrated. Landowners rent to structure owners, who on-rent to low-income residents. This pattern reflects past President Moi's strategy to keep his settlement in place; it is indicative of the high degree of "lock-in" associated with the spatial dimension of many urban problems. Increasing incomes in Nairobi have led to tenements with ten-storey single-room rentals (and communal water points and toilets on each floor). In Mogadishu, the scale of humanitarian assistance related to internally displaced people (IDPs) means that the camps provide rents for multiple powerful players and, despite government to reform IDP shelter

options, displacement camps are widespread. At the same time, clan leaders seek to strengthen voting blocks in the city. This means that IDPs are denied residency rights in Mogadishu and forced to stay in camps on the periphery of the city. We will need to be alert to these differences when investigating and comparing domains across cities.

## 4.3. Key urban development domains: A provisional selection

ACRC has so far identified eight possible domains, the numbering of which is not indicative of any priority. There are three "blocks" of domains. Economic domains are: those that focus primarily on income and asset generation; domains that relate primarily to the built environment, whilst also playing important economic and social roles; and societal domains that affect all citizens and their efforts to secure health, wellbeing and opportunity. The last two on the list have a particular focus on poverty reduction, although all domains include important distributional questions.

This selection of domains emerged from ACRC's experiential and scholarly analysis of urban development interventions. As ideas about domains were presented at ACRC's partner meetings and the concept discussed in more detail, an initial list of possible domains was amended. We did not map all possible domains; rather, we worked from the bottom up in terms of drawing on the grounded and intellectual expertise of our partners and then subjecting these to testing beyond the immediate partnership. The aim was to identify a set of domains that reflected both the needs of low-income and disadvantaged groups, and the priorities of city governments. They also reflect the interests of a range of national and international development agencies which have invested in programmes to address urban development priorities. However, we are aware of the potential of alternative domains or of alternative framings of domains that may cut across those identified here and which might be more effective in terms of building reform activities. Our domains are – in this sense – provisional and we remain open to their reworking through the next phase of our research.

### *4.3.1. Proposed domains*

1. Structural transformation
2. Neighbourhood and district economic development
3. Land and connectivity
4. Housing
5. Informal settlements
6. Health, wellbeing and nutrition
7. Safety and security
8. Youth capability development.

Further details of each domain are offered in the Appendix, with a particular focus on the politics of each domain, the key actors and ideas involved, and the types of complex problem with which they are often associated.

## 5. Conclusion

The preceding sections have laid out the three key components of our framework: political settlements; city of systems; and urban development domains. “Political settlements” are agreements among a society’s most powerful groups about the basic rules of the political and economic game, rules that prevent the society from descending into all-out civil war because they are expected to furnish a minimally acceptable level of benefits for those same powerful groups. Political settlements analysis identifies these powerful groups and categorises them into three blocs according to their relationship to the country’s de facto leadership. The relative strength of these blocs is then used to help assess the degree to which power is “concentrated” or “dispersed”, while the magnitude of the settlement’s “insider” groups is used to assess the breadth of its “social foundation”. These constructs can also be applied to the city level, with the interrelation between the national- and city-level power configuration expected to provide insights into the form that urban problems take and the potential for solving them.

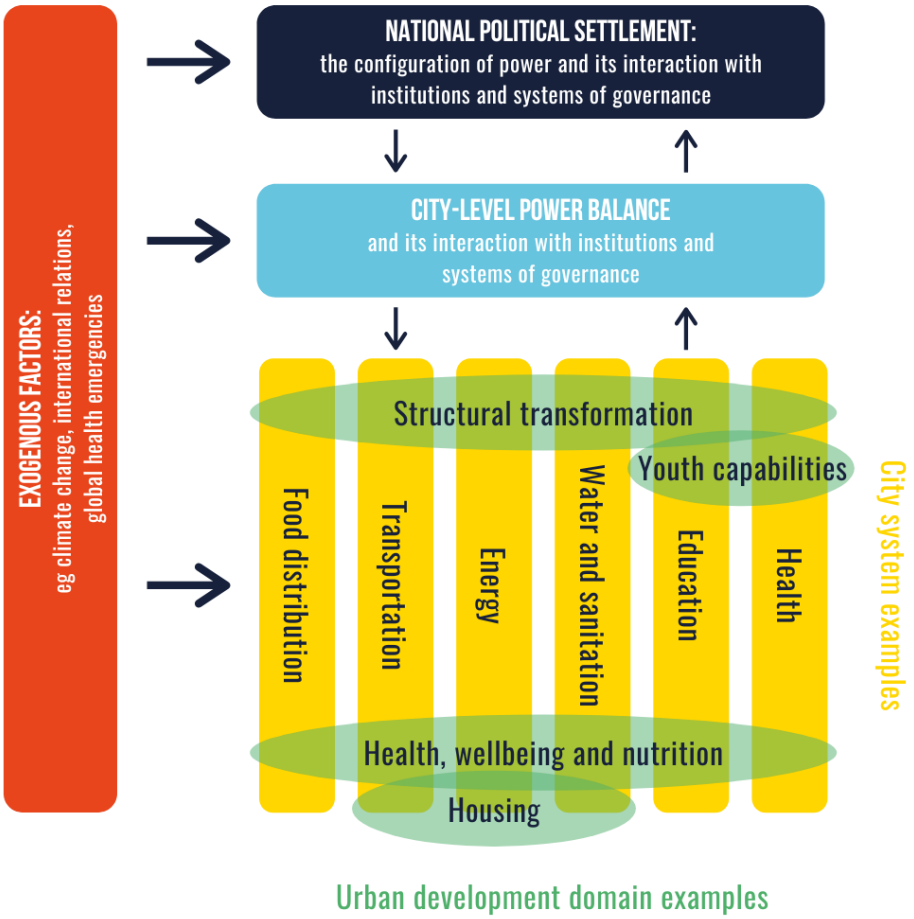
Our “city of systems” approach provides another lens on the intractability of urban development problems. In our framework, cities are understood as imperfectly bounded assemblages of interrelated and sometimes quite heterogeneous stocks and flows of material *and social* resources, imperfectly and incompletely connected through networks and feedback loops. We have an interest in systems such as food distribution, energy, water, transportation, education and health. Each of these systems has its own internal politics and is linked to wider urban political economies; outcomes within each system are influenced, more or less directly, by the political settlement and city-level power balance.

Individual city systems matter for urban development but the most complex and intractable problems in African cities are generally characterised by the ways in which multiple systems not only function ineffectively but are also poorly integrated with each other. We capture both this and the political economy of development in African cities through our notion of “urban development domains”, the third component of our framework. These are fields of power, policy and practice that are relevant to the solution of particular problems. They are constituted by multiple actors that seek to claim authority and rights over a particular field and by the multiple city systems that are responsible for the resources and services flowing through that domain. Domains are highly political, both because they are sites of contestation between actors with different interests and ideas *and* because they may play a wider role in sustaining the balance of power within the city- and national-level settlements (for example, through providing rent-seeking opportunities, legitimacy and/or votes for powerful players). Even if they do not play a role in power struggles at the city and national level, they are sites of contestation between sub-city elites who seek to position themselves advantageously, securing rents and influence.

Figure 4 illustrates how these core concepts relate to one another. The figure can be approached from any angle, but here we describe it from the bottom up. Within selected urban development domains, such as housing or health, wellbeing and nutrition, we expect to find constellations of international and domestic actors with their own ideas and interests and more or less institutionalised ways of relating to one another. These span multiple city systems, which will themselves be comprised of actors with ideas and interests arranged in various formal or informal institutional relationships and, to a greater or less extent, embedded in or struggling over various material flows and structures. Some of these domains will be relatively discrete from one another, as in the examples of housing and youth capabilities in our diagram, while others, like youth capabilities and structural transformation, may interrelate and/or overlap in areas such as actors or activities.

Both the domains and the systems, meanwhile, will be connected in the sense of being interwoven – that is, having complex causal relations with – a city's politics and the nation's political settlement, again to greater or lesser degree. In some cases, these will place a set of more or less loose constraints on what it is possible to do in terms of urban reform, particularly with respect to addressing urban injustice, securing political inclusion and redistributing resources to the benefit of disadvantaged groups. In others, especially those where votes or rents or security are critical to the reproduction of the settlement, the ideas and interests of actors in the city's politics or national settlement will reach right into these arenas, shaping them directly. In all cases, we expect that the scope for inclusive urban development efforts at the city scale, and in terms of the contribution of cities to national development, will be influenced by the degree of power concentration and the breadth of the social foundation at national and local levels, though this remains to be tested. Note also that in some cases the city's power balance and the national settlement will be closely aligned, and in others they will be in tension. The nature of this relationship is also likely to affect the scope for solving problems in urban development domains, as of course will the nature of the built environment and the city systems with which it is involved. Simultaneously, all three dimensions will be influenced by exogenous factors, such as climate change, international relations and global health emergencies, whilst certain other flows of international ideas and finance, for example, will become constituent parts of the political settlements and domains mapped out here.

**Figure 4: ACRC's conceptual framework**




Our city-level research will therefore involve mapping political settlements, city politics, systems and urban development domains, furnishing some general insights about how they relate to one another in practice. We will analyse outcomes at the domain level, seeking to understand the ways in which system failures and unanticipated system interactions (both positive and negative), influence what can be achieved in the context of particular sets of power relations within domains, cities and the wider political settlement. Identifying particular urban development problems that appear to be a priority for those cities, we will analyse them through this framework, using it to identify powerful actors, potential reform coalitions, new ideas, and windows of opportunity for action. At all stages of our research, we will work closely with city stakeholders, with a view to identifying and understanding problems, sharing the insights that our framework generates, as well as listening to how the framework can be improved. As we move forward, we will use our politically informed and systemic problem diagnosis to identify and co-create solutions for priority complex problems.

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## Appendix: ACRC's provisional urban development domains[16]

This Appendix briefly introduces each urban development domain that will form the focus of ACRC's research and uptake work. Each entry has been prepared by the ACRC member or members with the most relevant experience of the domain in question, with the exception of land and connectivity. Each sets out the contours of each domain as a key field of theory, policy and practice within urban development, with a particular focus on the politics of each domain, and the key actors and ideas involved in defining the nature of the problems and potential solutions within each.

### A1. Structural transformation

Structural transformation involves the movement of workers from low-productivity sectors to high-productivity sectors. It has historically been associated with a shift from agrarian to more industrial economies based around urban areas, and with playing a crucial role in economic growth and poverty reduction by creating jobs and improving labour productivity. However, many African countries have witnessed urbanisation without structural transformation. Consequently, the economic sectors of African cities are dominated mainly by low-productivity informal enterprises, with a large segment of the population employed in the informal wage economy, often through self-employment. The influence of globalisation and the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) imposed in the 1980s and 1990s further constrained the possibility of African economies following the traditional route of economic development via industrialisation. Given the high number of workers trapped in low-productivity employment in African cities, disentangling the connections between cities and structural change will be essential for growth and poverty reduction. Key city-systems of urban planning, infrastructural service provision (such as transport, energy, water and waste management), productivity-enhancing policies and regulatory frameworks, and educational and technology accumulation strategies need to be pulled together to facilitate structural transformation.

The political economy of city economies and structural transformation involves ruling elites being committed to investing in learning rents[17] for firms, providing the public infrastructure required for firms to operate productively and building productive forms of state–business relations. This can stand in tension with the incentives facing elites to extract rents from firms and household enterprises and to enter into collusive relationships that can include offering subsidies and contracts in return for political and personal financing. Some ruling elites use job creation for un/semi-skilled youth as a means to gain legitimacy. Ruling elites, business elites and their associations, collectives of small and medium enterprises, financial institutions and state agencies

[16] With thanks to Ezana Weldeghebrael, Research Associate with ACRC, for editing the initial material prepared for this Appendix into shape.
[17] Learning rents, such as infant industry subsidies and the prioritisation of relevant infrastructure, "provide the financing to enhance technical capability through learning-by-doing and to improve organizational capability" of firms (Ngo, 2016: 1052).

(such as investment commissions, ministries of trade, industry and commerce, and revenue authorities) play a significant role in the prioritisation and allocation of sector-wide or exclusive access (based on identity or political affiliation) to rent. Some national initiatives to facilitate structural transformation involve developing productivity enhancing “smart cities” that use digital and telecommunication technologies and transportation corridors. Investment climate reform is also another national initiative, often in response to donor pressure. Such moves are associated with a range of paradigmatic ideas, including the development of city economies and structural transformation, charter cities, “modernisation” and agglomeration economies.

### A2. Neighbourhood and district economic development

The majority of African urban residents live in informal settlements, which are also the location of residents’ micro- or household enterprises engaged in a wide range of economic activities. These include small shops (often run from dwellings) selling food and household goods, personal service providers, such as hairdressers, and catering services (shebeens and restaurants). There are also micro- and small enterprises in these settlements engaged in manufacturing, such as metalwork and furniture-making for household fittings and machine maintenance (cars, motorcycles, small household appliances). However, due to low productivity and catering to small markets, earnings from these activities are often low and precarious, leaving income poverty high in informal settlements. In addition, most informal settlements have numerous informal moneylenders providing vital services to residents, although usually on exploitative terms. Residents of informal settlements are often engaged in economic activity beyond their neighbourhood, both through their own microenterprises and through employment in larger businesses. Larger businesses are not necessarily formal but tend to be more stable, regularised and with better established markets than micro-enterprises. However, the unreliable infrastructural services and limited agglomeration externalities in African cities means that there are few such firms, thus limiting their contribution to poverty reduction and structural transformation. There is a considerable need to improve the living standards of the urban poor by strengthening city economies and enhancing livelihoods through generating “decent work” opportunities and boosting entrepreneurial skills. To this effect, city systems, such as land and planning regulations, infrastructural services (energy, water and transport), financial services, entrepreneurial and business development services, and policy and business regulatory frameworks, need to be mobilised for the smooth functioning of enterprises.

The political economy of neighbourhood and district economic development reflects the distribution of economic and land rent in the local economy. Ruling elites can promote inclusive economic development to gain legitimacy by promoting enterprise development and channelling learning rent to priority sectors. However, some ruling elites may selectively favour particular ethnic or other identity groups to dominate specific lucrative sectors. Moreover, some informal economies, especially those based in the inner city, also generate large amounts of money, and political elites are inclined to extract part of the rent generated. On the flip side, workers and businesses also form

associations to lobby the government for better market access, inputs, regulations and infrastructures through formal and informal platforms, including state-business forums, involving political financing and political mobilisation. Governments find it challenging to strike a balance between supporting the growth of formal business and foreign firms, which may increase inequality, and promoting micro-enterprises. Similarly, formalising informal business and safeguarding product quality, working conditions and environmental impacts are important but challenging agendas.

A wide range of key actors are involved in this domain, including: economic development agencies; business/trade associations; networks of informal businesses; large businesses; financial sector organisations; cooperatives; formal utility providers; municipal agencies involved in land, health, environment; trade unions and other labour organisations; planners and economists; and local politicians.

Several policy ideas are influential in the neighbourhood and district economies domain. For example, the policy approach of clustering small and micro-enterprises can deliver many benefits but it also risks creating cost-raising congestion and intensifying market competition between undifferentiated producers. The challenges facing larger businesses also need to be addressed to enhance their impact on increasing the incomes and livelihoods of the local population, both directly, through building their own labour force's skills, and indirectly, through promoting import-substitution strategies. Overall, a “multi-track” strategy is needed to facilitate the integration and linkage between large, micro- and household enterprises. “Upgrading” processes within value chains of large firms (often foreign) are a promising route to stabilising small enterprises and enabling expansion and productivity growth. However, it is crucial to mitigate the unequalising tendency of integration, whereby some small enterprises benefit, while others get squeezed out.

### A3. Land and connectivity

Land access and, potentially, ownership (or the lack of these) are crucial in determining economic and social opportunities for many African city residents and play a central role in political discourses, identities and conflicts. Land administration is crucial for poverty reduction efforts and to facilitate bottom-up wealth creation and development. Access to and rights over land determine housing availability and affordability, access to basic services and employment, positive and negative agglomeration externalities, household asset accumulation, social security and physical safety. Urban land is deeply embedded in a range of socio-technical infrastructural, ecological, institutional and social connectivity systems. Thus, key city-systems, such as financial, infrastructure, social networks (including kinship and clan systems), political (including the political role of traditional forms of authority), and gender and generational systems are central to the effective functioning of the urban land domain.

Urban land issues are, however, an intensely political subject – making it challenging for technical interventions, since access and rights over land play a significant role in

determining social and economic outcomes and defining identity and a sense of belonging. Land features in many political campaigns, and claims about the actual or potential redistribution of land and land rights occupy a central role in the legitimation efforts of many governments. This could be achieved through streamlining land management to expand urban residents' welfare and enhance economic productivity to gain legitimacy, although in the absence of a well-developed productive capitalist economy, ruling elites often use land as a principal source of rent distribution to buy political support. This has substantial implications for the effectiveness of planning, regulation and taxation, and equitable access to land and economic productivity. Additionally, the co-existence of formal property rights with customary land tenure regimes and the prevalent informal land markets intersecting one another has produced unanticipated and contentious outcomes. Both formal and informal land governance institutions usually exclude women, youth and ethnic minorities from accessing land or land rights in many African cities. Land issues are further complicated by the central government's level of power concentration and the extent of decentralised control over land, especially in federated states. In federal systems, where state governments overlap significantly with a city/metropolitan area (such as Addis Ababa or Lagos), powers over land at the city level can be substantial. However, national land ministries often play a decisive role in land management in most African cities, while underresourced city authorities are subjected to continuous central government interference.

Urban land domains draw in a wide range of actors. Key actors include freehold and leasehold landowners, city governments (as both governing authorities and holders of public land), local and national planning authorities, government ministries (particularly ministries of lands, works/infrastructure and transport, urban development), politicians at local and national levels, domestic elites investing in and speculating on land, utilities, property valuers, informal land brokers, individual households, and “customary” authorities and “traditional” landholding families/communities.

Various pragmatic ideological and policy ideas have shaped state-led land reforms and international donor support across the continent. These ideas include, but are not limited to, private property, dead capital, land nationalisation, communal or public land ownership, land value capture, and land tenure regularisation/formalisation. Additionally, the increased appetite for investment in land driven by economic growth, infrastructural expansion, and the “last development frontier” discourse has fuelled land price increase and speculative property development, and has entrenched the socio-spatial divide in many African cities. To enable African governments to use the increased land price to finance infrastructure and service investments, international development partners are also working with African governments on land reform, land value capture and enhancing property taxation.

## A4. Housing

In a context of continuing poverty, chronic underinvestment in basic infrastructure and contested land development, housing provision is lacking in African cities. In the absence of state support and affordable market opportunities, many households (even middle-class households) find housing in the informal sector, with associated insecurities. Housing is a significant priority for many households, providing protection from disease, safety and security, and access to essential basic services. A good location in relation to labour markets, a legal address and affordable cost are also important for urban residents. For city and national governments, construction is an important source of enterprise activity and employment. This relates both to the construction of buildings and also to many other related activities, such as doors, windows, roofing materials, bricks, and internal fittings, such as plumbing, tiles and plaster work. Housing may also be a site for household economic activities, including production (for example, tailoring), trading and services such as hairdressing. Subletting of rooms generates considerable income for some.

The cost, availability and suitability of housing options are influenced by multiple formal and informal systems. Key systems include the planning and regulatory systems for residential land development, bulk infrastructure connections and plot connections, construction materials, and housing finance and general savings opportunities. The political economy of housing reflects both discriminatory colonial land allocations and planning rules, as well as the subsequent response of democratic governments to these historical injustices; it also reflects the affordability of legal housing options, the nature of the construction sector, pressures on available shelter from growing urban populations, and the availability of land. Growing investment in housing development for high-income groups can contribute to housing insecurity through the displacement of low-income groups from inner-city locations, exacerbating spatial inequalities in the process.

A wide range of actors are involved in the domain of urban housing, including architects, planners, developers (that is, real estate interests and commercial construction companies), banks, material and housing fixture producers and suppliers, commercial housing finance companies, housing cooperatives, municipal housing departments, national housing departments, and national and local politicians. At the international level, UN Habitat, the World Bank and the Centre for Affordable Housing Finance all play roles, and diaspora groups have also financed some housing developments. A range of different ideas shape the housing domain: home ownership as the basis for modern citizenship; modern housing designs as part of a wider project of urban transformation and modernity; and the housing sector as a potential engine of economic growth and financial expansion.

Elites generally recognise the significance of housing and housing investments which have the potential to provide rents from state-contracted construction activities,

opportunities to manipulate electorates (with large-scale housing provision) and the potential to increase elite popularity if they are able to address the housing needs of urban residents. However, the relatively high cost of housing delivery means that there is little opportunity for city-specific solutions, with national support being required for improved housing delivery at scale. There is a lack of consensus over whether mass housing programmes and/or the potential for incremental housing development are the best way to address low-income housing need. There is now growing global interest in "affordable" (for example, middle-income) housing in Africa as a new investment opportunity. The extent to which housing subsidies are provided, and how they are provided and to whom, may also be contentious, as might alternative, more environmentally friendly building materials.

### A5. Informal settlements

More than half of residents in most African cities live in informal settlements with insecure tenure, lack of basic services and infrastructure and, frequently, unsafe housing. There is now a widespread recognition, within policy and academic circles, that most of these households are best served by upgrading programmes that enable them to remain in situ, without disrupting their livelihood and social networks. Informal settlement upgrading is significant for poverty reduction, enabling low-income households to secure essential services at a lower cost, improve their social status, and address spatial inequality. Access to better services helps to improve health, thereby improving the incomes and wellbeing of residents. Upgrading will also help address the needs of some vulnerable groups, such as women-headed households, people with disabilities and marginalised minorities. Upgrading offers multiple opportunities for income generation, and the approach of "community contracting" directly benefits local companies and residents. Inclusive in situ informal settlement upgrading materialises when well-organised residents negotiate with authorities and other development partners. Additionally, critical city-systems of bulk infrastructure and service package provision, planning and building regulation compliance (such as reblocking), modes of housing/tenure regularisation, and upgrading finance and saving schemes need to be pulled together for effective implementation of informal settlement upgrading.

Elites increasingly recognise the potential of informal settlement upgrading in enhancing their popularity and electoral success, increasing payments of rates and service charges and rents from infrastructure installation. The upgrading process can also enhance the bargaining power of resident associations. Nonetheless, some politicians may use informal settlement upgrading interventions as patronage to secure political loyalty from the upgraded neighbourhood residents (for example, writing off loans related to upgrading and land titling), including with those who share a similar ethnic composition. Politicians also use local community leaders during upgrading interventions, and these leaders may exploit residents in relation to rents, access to land and charges for services. However, upgrading may not be acceptable to some politicians, who prefer the "modern" city.

A wide range of key actors are involved during informal settlement upgrading. These key actors include planners, engineers and architects, residents' associations, tenants' associations, landlords and their associations, informal service providers, utilities or municipally provided services, land regularisation agencies, micro-finance agencies, and municipal planning departments.

A number of contentious issues shape the challenge of upgrading, including whether the neighbourhood is on public or private land. Reblocking – that is, the moving and/or reshaping of plots – might also be required to comply with planning regulations and install infrastructure and services. The scope of upgrading can be minimal, limited to communal service provision, or avoidance of the threat of eviction, or complete, providing infrastructure and services available for formal housing within the same city, or incremental. Most importantly, some of the costs of upgrading might be transferred to residents, which can be a challenge to low-income households. Besides, tenants are less likely to be included in upgrading interventions, and consequent rent rises might adversely affect them. Overall, upgrading requires the support of key actors and context-specific approaches. Table 2 provides a broader framework for a customised citywide upgrading.

**Table 2: City-wide upgrading customised strategies matrix**

| | Private land | Public land |
|---|---|---|
| **Peripheral low-density** | Negotiate access to land which may require purchase by municipality or community. Then as for public land. | The potential need for reblocking, installation of basic services, community participation and involvement in implementation, some form of titling. |
| **Inner-city high-density** | As above, may be considerable opposition to upgrading (rather than displacement) if there are high potential rents. | As above, plus medium-rise apartments are likely to be required because of high densities. |

## A6. Health, wellbeing and nutrition

Many residents of African cities, particularly those living in poverty, face considerable health, nutrition and wellbeing challenges and marginalisation or exclusion in accessing healthcare. However, their challenges are often masked in national and regional data and policy debates by the so-called "urban advantage". In many African cities, poor access to clean water and sanitation, and malnutrition have made many residents, especially those living in informal settlements, vulnerable to communicable diseases, such as malaria and tuberculosis. The Covid-19 crisis has illustrated many specific health vulnerabilities in cities, and their importance to national and global health security. The pandemic has also shown that advances in food and nutrition security in urban centres are fragile, while at the same time essential for resilience. Many African

residents of informal settlements are also vulnerable to non-communicable diseases, due to household and neighbourhood air pollution (many linked to energy sources), climate change health risks (heat and flood), and energy-dense and nutrient-poor diets. Moreover, in many African cities, the limited access to affordable and quality health services and education care has compromised the wellbeing of many. City-specific emerging health problems with local and global dimensions, including zoonoses and climate change-induced transformations in disease patterns, such as malaria, are other challenges facing several African cities. Thus, ensuring health, wellbeing and proper nutrition is essential for poverty reduction and for building a productive citizenry. This requires achieving higher levels of integration between multiple city systems, including healthcare, food, water and sanitation, waste management, energy, and broader spatial planning systems.

The political dimensions of the domain relate mainly to the electoral rewards and popular legitimacy to be gained by governments that prove capable of providing access to affordable and higher quality health services and basic foodstuffs for wellbeing. The specific political economy of nutrition and food systems encompasses food distribution systems, food safety and land-use regulation, which is sometimes used to favour big supermarkets at the expense of fresh market informal vendors. Price hikes in basic foodstuffs have resulted in protests and food riots. The political economy of healthcare involves the expansion of health centres, sometimes without adequate staff and equipment, for short-term election success and for transferring rent for politically loyal businesses during construction.

Health, nutrition and wellbeing issues are increasingly framed as justice and security concerns, such as achieving health for all and universal healthcare (UHC), food and nutrition security, sexual and reproductive rights, and sustainable diet. Policy approaches – such as improving infrastructures through water, sanitation and hygiene, exemptions and waivers of health services, making “clean” cookstoves and other energy sources accessible, and provision of safe communal safe food (community kitchens), promoting urban agriculture, and provision of food vending spaces – could reduce health risks, and improves nutrition and overall wellbeing. In addition, training and assigning community healthworkers to provide primary healthcare, health education and nutrition support in low-income urban settlements could expand access to health and integration with the formal health services. Expanding subsidised social health insurance could also increase access and affordability of health services.

### A7. Safety and security

This domain promotes safety and security through measures that reduce violence and crime and address the perception and fear of harm. In conflict-affected states, the domain is also concerned with conflict resolution and facilitating the integration of internally displaced people (IDPs). Many residents of African cities are vulnerable to widespread crime and violence and feel insecure due to the risk of personal and communal harm and loss/damage to property. Perceived and real threats of violence or

exposure to crime can limit mobility – particularly for women and girls, children and minority groups – with a knock-on effect on education, livelihoods and general wellbeing. Notably, in conflict-affected African states, conflict, armed insurgency and terrorism might unfold in cities or generate an exodus of refugees and IDPs into urban areas. In general, crime, violence and conflict undermine economic growth, deepen mistrust of governance, security and justice institutions, and frequently lead to vigilante organisations and “street justice”. Enhancing safety and security concerns requires pulling together various city systems, such as transport, road networks, policing, land ownership, water and sanitation, and electricity.

The political economy of safety and security reflects the distribution of power and economic rent among elites, income inequality and the incentive/disincentive for various actors to use violence. Elites could strive to achieve broad-based legitimacy through ensuring safety and security by building capable and trusted institutions. However, some politicians (including elected officials) sometimes use violence to achieve political or development goals, such as slum clearance. In their effort to reduce crime in high- and middle-income neighbourhoods, law enforcement forces also tend to employ heavy-handed measures targeting those who live in low-income settlements, including curfews and extrajudicial executions. Additionally, when security and justice institutions are corrupt or captured by criminal groups, it usually leads to the prevalence of unaccountable vigilante groups and street justice. The architecture of security for the rich – walls, fences, armed guards, private roads and complexes – also reduces the quality of public space for other users and limits the mobility of the urban poor. Moreover, in post-conflict cities, how the conflict ended, and the extent to which the emerging political settlement includes various urban constituencies, determines the incentive/disincentive for armed groups to engage in violence. Besides, the arrival of large numbers of displaced people into a city may threaten political settlement, increase competition for jobs, housing/land, and basic services, and give rise to tensions with host communities. A wide range of actors plays an influential role in the safety and security domain. These actors include law enforcement agencies, local officials, spatial and transport planners, property developers, community groups, neighbourhood associations, IDPs, and paramilitary and other armed groups.

Analytical ideas such as “violence chains”, which identify different types of violence and how they intersect and are embedded in institutional settings, are crucial to understand structural causes of violence and design policy responses to promote safe and inclusive cities. Investigations of the “tipping points” of urban conflict also help us to understand how violence is intertwined with political exclusions, gendered insecurity, the “youth bulge” and growth in poverty. Policy approaches, such as community security initiatives, give special attention to specific spaces, relations and groups of people, especially those living in precarious conditions. Examples of community security initiatives include community policing, mediation of conflicting parties, targeted education and recreation projects for at-risk youth, rehabilitation, and childcare support.

## A8. Youth and capability development

Africa has the youngest population in the world. In most parts of Africa, children and young people constitute a significant proportion of the vulnerable segments of the urban population. In making the transition to adulthood – and from dependence to independence – young urban citizens face several economic and political challenges that disproportionately push them to be unemployed, underemployed, and informally employed and to work in hazardous conditions. The prolonged time young people spend "waiting" for opportunities compromises their self-esteem and optimism, makes them feel frustrated and disenfranchised and pushes them to engage in criminal and risky behaviour. These challenges are particularly severe in big cities, where inequality is high and young people are increasingly excluded from urban development interventions. In addition, young women face intersectional vulnerabilities based on their gender and age, exposing them to high levels of early pregnancy, gender-based violence and physical and economic insecurity. Capability development and improving access to quality educational institutions is critical for young people to be able to make better choices and expand their access to productive employment opportunities, which is vital for African cities to secure broad-based poverty reduction and prosperity. To this end, key city systems, such as formal and informal education systems, financial services and systems, and spaces to protect children and young people, need to be pulled together to deliver youth capacity development effectively.

The political dimension of this domain reflects the demographic potential of youth in determining political outcomes and their significant economic contribution. Ruling elites could garner broadbased support from young people if they deliver on expanding political participation and economic opportunities. However, some ruling elites seek to co-opt young people through material concessions (such as job opportunities and micro-credits), clientelist relations, and symbolic rewards (such as ethnonationalism and religious fundamentalism) to support their political agenda. Notably, during election campaigns, politicians compete to mobilise young people to secure electoral success. Although some African countries have political systems that ensure youth representation, and most parties have youth wings, most youths usually do not feel represented and complain that politicians and urban officials hold negative stereotypes about them.

A wide range of actors are engaged in the youth and capability development domain, including central, regional and local state officials, politicians, employers, formal and informal educational institutions, policymakers, communities, role models, mentors, corporate social responsibility programmes, and young people and their organisations. Although youth- and child-friendly policy ideas are often promoted, such as African entrepreneurial youth, the framing of youth-related problems is often associated with potential political and civil unrest concerns. Capability development interventions to empower youth need to address the hard and soft skill gaps they face, not only those associated with the expansion of youth employment and productivity but also with

broader developmental assets through enhancing their participation in decision-making processes and supporting their efforts to foster more positive narratives around youth.

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- Freetown, Sierra Leone
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- Kampala, Uganda
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- Lagos, Nigeria
- Lilongwe, Malawi
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The African Cities Research Consortium is funded with UK aid from the UK government.
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