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Southern African Migration Project

NEPAD, the City and the Migrant: Implications for Urban Governance

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Editorial Note:

This is a revised version of a paper first published in *Development Update* Vol. 5. No. 1. The author, Caroline Kihato, is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Architecture and Planning, University of the Witwatersrand.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Migration is a growing phenomenon internationally. Between 1960 and 2000 international migrants in Africa increased from 9 million to 16 million. Although Africa has experienced a drop in the number of international migrants over the last two decades, it has more than double the number of migrants than Latin America and the Caribbean, and between a half and a third of the number in Asia. Flows of people from country to country across the continent are increasingly significant. Migration between cities across the continent is becoming a common phenomenon, as households attempt to secure their livelihoods.

1.2 In addition to cross-border migration into cities, high population growth rates and rural-urban migration contribute to creating one of the world's fastest urbanisation rates. It is estimated that almost half (46%) of Africa's projected population will live in cities by the year 2020. Cities are also the continent's engines of growth. Statistics show that urban economies in Africa contribute a larger proportion to the GDP than rural economies, which house the majority of the continent's population. Fully, 34% of Africa's population is urbanised, and this population contributes more than half (60%) of the continent's Gross Domestic Product.

1.3 These factors suggest the need to ensure that adequate political and policy attention is given to cities. But policy logics do not always fit reality. Post-independence policy interventions have focussed more on developing rural areas for a number of reasons. Rural populations were larger than urban ones, and rural areas were seen as the mainstay of urban economies—providing both food and raw material for urban industry. African governments and aid agencies in the 1960s and the following decades worried about the development inequalities between rural areas, the ripple effect this would have on population movements, and the sustainability of cities. Policies therefore aimed at curbing rural-urban migration through instigating growth in the agricultural and primary industry sectors with the objective of securing employment and livelihoods for rural dwellers. To boost rural development, co-operatives were set up; agricultural boards financed; rural areas electrified; feeder roads constructed; water programmes initiated; and, farming subsidies rolled out/extended. Politically, governments also felt the need to 'reach' their rural citizens, and control rural economies.

1.4 In the cities, governments seemed to have some form of control. After all, there was a strong presence of government administration and business institutions in capital cities (and other major towns), and there already existed fairly adequate levels of infrastructure. In fact, most colonial governments developed some road networks, housing, water and electrical infrastructure. The urgency to develop urban areas was therefore much less than the need to bolster rural areas. This is not to say that no new development took place in urban areas. Indeed, many cities expanded their housing and infrastructure programs to accommodate the influx of people from rural areas during this time. But the key to

successful urban areas and productive economies was perceived as a rural function – if rural areas succeeded, so too would cities.

1.5 The anti-urban bias, driven largely by government and development aid agencies, resulted in the neglect of urban spaces and populations. Combined with low economic growth rates, the negative impact of Structural Adjustment Programs on households, and the inability of city governments to provide services and enforce by-laws, this spawned a severe management crisis. Partly as a consequence of governments' inability to foster and promote an environment which enables households to secure sustainable livelihoods, the majority of the activities taking place in African cities are outside the formal sector:

> It is not simply…the breakdown of public infrastructure, service deterioration, or managerial inefficiency…it is the remarkable resilience of non state agencies to challenge the monopoly of state institutions in shaping the character of cities today, which is of striking importance. In most Third World cities, the bulk of housing, transportation, employment and trade takes place outside formal state institutions (McCarney 1996:11)

1.6 In East African cities, two thirds of the population live outside planned settlements with little or no infrastructure, while 75% of the labour force is engaged in activities in the informal sector (Halfani 1996). Local authorities regulate only 25% of the activities that take place within urban boundaries. Environmental and human degradation, together with high levels of poverty social polarisation and deprivation, have become defining characteristics of African cities. Despite these harsh realities, cities continue to be 'people' magnets' attracting migrants from rural areas as well as political and economic immigrants from other countries. It is estimated that international migrants in Southern Africa constituted and estimated 0.6% of the population in 2000. The figure is larger in other regions in Africa; in West Africa and East Africa international migrants comprise 2.7% and 1.8% of the population respectively. In South Africa, the majority of the migrants find their way to the country's major cities, attracted by the possibility of better economic, political and social opportunities.

1.7 This policy briefly questions the ability of formal developmental interventions to understand local contexts, and, by extension, govern urban spaces. It interrogates the relevance and implications of initiatives like the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)—which speak largely of formal interactions and formal economies—for urban development and the politics of claim-making with particular reference to Johannesburg. Brief commentary is provided on how NEPAD perceives migrants and their rights in the city, region or nation-state. The paper shows through a case study of the lives of migrants in inner city Johannesburg how a significant number of households continue to survive and are supported through informal networks which are outside the state, and how the state is often unable to harness or control these processes.

2.0 A New Commitment?

2.1 The recent focus on cities and processes of urbanisation by the African Union may turn the tide for Africa's migrants and the urban poor. In July 2003, the AU Summit held in Maputo (Mozambique) made a decision to promote the development of sustainable cities and towns in Africa. This decision was described as a 'breakthrough,' because it was the first time that urbanisation, and the challenges of facing African cities had featured on the organisation's agenda (UN-Habitat 2003). The decision by the AU assembly could not have come at a more opportune time.

2.2 The recognition at the highest policy level in Africa of the disjuncture between the real and potential socio-economic significance of African cities on the one hand, and the inability of city governments to provide social and economic security to majority of their citizens, on the other, is important. This is because it provides decision-makers the opportunity and political space to *really* understand their cities; the people who live in them; and, how (and when) they choose to engage and disengage with the formal state apparatus. For it is only when these dynamics are understood, that state institutions can begin to rise to the challenge of *truly* governing African cities. The establishment of a NEPAD city partnership programme—with seven cities across the continent—creates an opportunity for state and civil society organisations to understand the survival and livelihood strategies that the majority of African households rely upon, and to develop strategies that respond more appropriately to them.

2.3 Although the core NEPAD strategy document pays scant attention to urban areas, its policies impact on urban areas in three fundamental ways (NEPAD 2001). Firstly, it seeks to address the challenges confronted in providing adequate, reliable, accessible and affordable infrastructure. To this end, the policy suggests public private partnerships (PPPs) which encourage investment in infrastructure, and establishing frameworks that encourage market competition in service provision. Additionally, the document stresses the importance of involving both urban and rural poor in 'building, maintaining and managing infrastructure' (NEPAD 2001). Secondly, the democracy and political governance initiative of the NEPAD strategy aims at strengthening the political and administrative structures of African governments, and aligning these structures to principles of democracy, transparency, accountability, integrity, respect for human rights and the promotion of the rule of law. These transformations apply to city governments as well. Thirdly, the NEPAD strategy is firmly rooted in facilitating the integration of African economies. The strategy recognises that to accomplish this objective it needs to create an environment that allows for the ease of flow of both goods and people across borders. One of the aims of the transport sector strategy for example, is to 'reduce delays in cross-border movement of people, goods and services.' Pursuant to this, the strategy suggests that customers and immigration procedures are harmonised, and air and passenger freight links are increased across the continent. By implication, cities like Johannesburg will continue to be sites of increased flows of both people and goods. This

has implications for city administrations as their capacity to manage the ebb and flow of people within and through their domains will be tested.

2.4 Reflecting on these defining tenets of NEPAD's urban governance strategy, a number of issues come to the fore. The vision for greater integration recognises the link between migration and increased trade, and aims to facilitate the movement of people (and their goods) across borders. This has significant implications for migration policy across the continent, and particularly for South Africa. This is because since 1990, South Africa has experienced an increased inflow of documented and undocumented migrants, as well as asylum seekers and refugees from the rest of the continent. South Africa's official policy responses have been ambiguous, with different levels of government responding differently to foreign migration. NEPAD seemingly calls for more relaxed immigration laws and greater facilitation of movement of people between countries on the continent. The impact of this on current South African policy—criticized variously for being stringent and xenophobic—remains unclear.

2.5 It is also unclear what impact NEPAD's attempt to integrate the continent will have on existing transitional trade routes and networks, particularly those networks that remain invisible to states. Since the 1990s, South Africa had experienced unprecedented growth in trans-continental informal trade networks with large flows of money and goods, both legal and illicit, already flowing across borders on the continent (Crush and McDonald 2002). Will restructuring border policies and standardising visa and custom requirements allow for greater control of these networks by the state? Is control what is sought by the NEPAD policy? Will it ease the movement of poor households whose survival strategies rely on frequent border crossings? Will this in turn alleviate poverty? What implications will these strategies have for urban households and poverty?

2.6 NEPAD seems to advocate greater movement across borders to alleviate poverty and foster economic integration. Whether these policies can actually be implemented remains to be seen as they not only touch on sensitive political issues, but also question state sovereignty, and the ability of states to control national borders. A reading of South Africa's new migration legislation shows its preference for formally skilled, resourced and entrepreneurial individuals. Ordinary people, even though they may have secondary and tertiary education, and may prove to be adept entrepreneurs, are not considered seriously because they are perceived as draining existing social resources. Rather, it is high flying 'would class' companies and individuals that are sought. Johannesburg's 2003 development strategy also aggressively courts big investors and global entrepreneurs in the search for world class status. Much is said about global capital flows and making Johannesburg party to these networks. No mention is made of the grassroots networks that have come to characterise and sustain a sizable proportion of the city.

2.7 Johannesburg's aspiration to become an 'African Global City' emanates from a discourse that categorises cities by their ability to capture 'command and control' functions of multinational corporations. Understanding cities by their ability to attract and retain these

corporations has led to the establishment of a hierarchy, which is topped by London, Tokyo and New York (Friedmann 1986). No African cities make the mark; although Johannesburg was recently ranked among the top 55 cities in the world (the only African city to achieve such status) because of the role it plays within the global economic system. But this understanding of cities not only negates the importance of other city functions—a site of leisure and culture and for social and political interactions—it obliterates households whose unregulated economic strategies from below are lost in the hype. There is a 'globalisation from below' that is unrecognised within existing policy focused almost exclusively on big global movements of capital. How can policy reconcile these two distinct processes? It would be unfair to second-guess the NEPAD strategy, except to say that it remains unclear whether NEPAD would indeed support the kinds of 'global' movements, transactions and networks that are becoming common. For cities like Johannesburg, the bias is clear. The question is whether the AU's and NEPAD's focus on urbanisation can inject new approaches to improve our understanding of and responses to vulnerable urban households and their survival strategies.

2.8 The actions suggested in NEPAD as they relate to service provision, administrative transformation and governance, community participation in infrastructure development, accountability and transparency are not novel. Such policies have been tried and tested across the continent with varying levels of success. The point here though, is not that these strategies are 'old' or lack innovation but that they seek to strengthen formal administrative mechanisms that currently have limited management control over the majority of people and the transactions occurring within cities. The suggested actions assume that strengthening city government administrations, improving service delivery and enhancing democratic processes will inevitably deliver firm control of the informal (unregulated) sector. Or, put differently, that a more efficient, effective and responsive city administration will provide adequate incentives to lure citizens back into the formal economy, where they will be willing to operate within the confines of its rules and regulations. Efficiency is essential in any bureaucracy, and presumably, a good number of households turn to the informal economy because of their frustrations with the inability of the state to respond to their needs. However, there is a limit to which technocratic responses guarantee citizen compliance, just as there is a limit to the extent that technocratic processes can read and understand many of the 'informal' transactions that occur outside the formal state.

3.0 Africa's Cities and Their Dynamics

3.1 Many households in Africa are increasingly turning to cross-border migration as a household survival strategy. The decision to send a member of the family to another country is often deliberated by family members, who frequently contribute to the cost of the journey. Yet even among forced migrants, not all members of the household emigrate. Factors such as money and age influence who, and how many members of a family, will move to another country. But another important calculation is made. Households will often choose the members who are most likely to find work and support their family back

home. Similarly, rarely does the whole household emigrate. Often, one or two members of a household emigrate to the new host city, and once they are able to support themselves, they may 'send' for other family members. Barring a war completely ravaging a particular community, a base is always retained in the country of origin. This way, to use economic parlance, households are able to spread their risk and optimise the resources available to them.

3.2 Households across the continent employ a diverse range of survival strategies, and cross-border migration to cities is becoming an increasingly important one for many. A 2003 survey by the Forced Migration Studies Programme at Wits University provides supporting evidence for this. According to the survey—which focussed on communities from refugee producing countries—half of those interviewed left their countries to escape war and conflict. More than a third (36.8%) also said that they left their countries for economic reasons—to find jobs and seek an improved standard of living. When asked the primary reason for moving to South Africa (Johannesburg), the relative importance of economic and political reasons even out. In fact, the possibilities of finding economic opportunities in South Africa gain slightly more significance than political freedom. A significant number of émigrés (86.1%) claim that there are still members of households left in their country of origin, and frequent contact is maintained with them. Generally, it is single males between 18 and 35 years of age that migrate, the majority of whom (54.2%) have completed secondary schooling. About 18% of the migrants have finished tertiary education (university degree or diploma). Approximately eighty percent of those surveyed lived in a city most of their lives before leaving their country of origin.

3.3 On arrival, most migrants stay with friends from their country of origin. They learn about their first residence mainly through friends and a few through family and relatives. It is through these networks that housing is accessed, job opportunities are created, 'papers' (South African documentation, or visas) are sorted out, loans become available, security is provided, rules and regulations are established, and compliance is sought. It is in this 'unofficial' and 'unregulated' realm that many migrants in inner city Johannesburg live.

3.4 After 1990, many Africans on the continent were able to travel to South Africa as their governments lifted the travel boycott in place during the apartheid era. Increasing political and social turmoil on the continent in Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, DRC, Burundi and so on triggered the movement of people to South Africa, which was perceived as relatively peaceful. A growing economic crisis on the continent also acted as a 'push' factor for many seeking wealth and economic opportunities in a country perceived as being one of the wealthiest on the continent. Johannesburg is one of the major magnets attracting foreigners, quite predictably because it is the country's economic capital, potentially offering a variety of economic opportunities to newcomers. The inner city is a particularly attractive property and the potential business opportunities available render it an important first stop for incoming migrants.

3.5 Ironically, the opportunities that inner city Johannesburg promises migrants are in reality very limited, or in many cases non-existent. Living conditions are often harsh, business and economic opportunities constrained, with few households able to make ends meet. Research conducted in the inner city reveals that migrants live in conditions that are often worse than those in their home countries. Accommodation is in shared, overcrowded, poorly maintained flats. Many buildings housing migrants in the inner city lack electricity or water, and most contravene local government safety and health by-laws.

3.6 Similarly, business or work opportunities are limited. The Wits Survey indicates that few migrants have formal employment. Of the foreign migrants interviewed, over two-thirds were self employed, i.e. running small businesses and income generation projects. As migrants are often undocumented, they are unable to secure formal sector employment even though they are often relatively well-qualified (Morris and Bouillon 2001). Many are involved in informal businesses such as selling vegetables, clothes and other goods on street pavements or municipal markets. Others run small businesses such as welding, hairdressing, tailoring and retailing shops. Even where these initiatives have managed to support families, revenue streams are threatened because of the precarious status of informal small businesses.

3.7 The experience of Johannesburg's new immigrants mirror those of a growing number of increasingly displaced people who work their way through the continent's cities in search of more stable and sustainable livelihoods. Illegal migrants are particularly vulnerable and are often forced to remain invisible from the state, conducting many of their transactions outside the government-regulated realm. Research on migrants in Johannesburg has shown that all foreigners, notwithstanding their status, feel a great deal of insecurity and are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by the police, landlords, and xenophobic attacks from South Africans. Even refugee groups and 'legal aliens,' who are entitled to services, and permitted to work, state that they live in constant fear of arrest, and restrict their movements to avoid any encounter with the law.

3.8 The effort of the Johannesburg Council to 'reformat' street traders is a good illustration. Hawkers, and unregulated street traders in Johannesburg city had (according to the Council, some residents, shop and property owners) become a 'problem' that needed to be dealt with. For the Council, it was not only that they were an 'eyesore,' interfering with street paths, harbouring criminal elements and causing 'crime and grime' in the city; it was that the city could not *control* them. They did not know how many there were; how many were foreign nationals or locals; they did not know where to find them if they needed answers; and they could not tax them if they so wished. The city's solution was to set up formal trading markets where all traders would have to register. They would be allocated a carefully measured space and systems devised to record and track where and who was trading; what they were selling; and how many there were. This would not only take the street traders off the street and wipe out the crime and grime that their presence supposedly caused; it would also ensure that they could pin down those not paying for their rates and services at the market.

3.9 Viewed synoptically, Council had done it again: reclaimed the streets from the rowdy and unruly rabble. Order was restored through the creation of a neat, tidy, regulated and controlled space for hawkers. But things did not quite work out as planned. For a while the hawkers refused to use the new market. When they finally moved in, they refused to pay rent which they argued was too high. Many of the hawkers said that they had lost business because they relied largely in previous locations on the spontaneity of by-passers. Sales dropped for many who were unable to obtain prime positions on stands facing the pavements. The added pressure of having to pay the rents made it impossible for some to eke out a living. The Council still struggles to collect rates, and some hawkers, rightly or wrongly, still argue that they were better off on the streets.

3.10 Policy-makers are no closer to 'seeing' cities and understanding them now than they were during apartheid. It is not a surprise that when confronted with the question of what the Joburg Council can do about migrants in the inner city, its usual response is: "We want to know why they are here, where they live, and whether they have the necessary documentation." And this is understandable; an institution requires some basic level of information (formatted in a way it understands), before it can size up the magnitude of the problem and provide a budget for the implementation of programmes; viz. deportation, social welfare, or economic programmes. But the likelihood of making the inner city 'legible,' and obtaining migrant information in a format which the state can digest/process (e.g. base line data on migrant numbers and status) is extremely difficult, not least because migrants do not want the state to 'see' them.

3.11 Suppose that miraculously this data is collected and the council is able to use it, what will they make of it? Will they move closer to understanding the intricate web of transactions and household livelihoods that connect the continent? Would the state be able to respond adequately to the needs of these vulnerable households? Indeed, it is not merely a question of state capacity to respond to vulnerable households, but its ability to 'see' and understand local contexts. Arguably, the nature of local government adds very little to the 'seeing' and 'understanding' capabilities of the state. Moreover, it is less a question of whether the state has the wherewithal to respond to local contexts but, more pertinently, that it is partially blind, failing to see and understand what it is that it is trying to control.

3.12 What kind of government will engage with the whole city rather than the part it can see or 'speak' to? What kind of government will understand that informal and engage with it on its own terms? There seems agreement in the urban governance literature that current state-centered attempts to manage cities have proven ineffective. Rather than managing cities along the traditional lines of regulation, through 'strong' bureaucratic administration, urban governance should consist of forging new kinds of relationships between city governments and other local institutions (McCarney 1996). The way in which these relationships are forged is a matter of debate. Friedman (nd) argues that it is through a renewed belief in democratic politics. This translates—at the very least—into creating a space of real political engagement where urban government seeks and forms

alliances with like-minded sectors of civil society and engages or negotiates with its opponents. The argument is that formal state-led participatory processes tend to avoid real deliberation and institutionalise democracy in ways that are exclusionary (Friedman nd).

3.13 Swilling et al (2002) stress the need for understanding urban management as a relational process; i.e. building 'relational webs' between the range of stakeholders and actors in the cities in formal, informal and unregulated spheres. This not only acknowledges those sectors of society that are sought by local government—the high flying investors—but also the networks and relationships that occur at very local levels. Through these processes new agendas and priorities begin to emerge, as different groups create new opportunities for claim making. But it is not just the agendas that change, new processes of managing cities are created as local governments are compelled to respond to the demands made by new relationships.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 What is the future of migrants and the multitude of household networks across the African continent? Can current NEPAD initiatives take us a step closer to understanding how a city like Johannesburg can be governed? The acknowledgement of migration as integral to successful economic integration between cities and states in Africa affirms the realities of many households on the continent. It also confirms what households on the continent seem to have figured out; survival is increasingly dependent on movement and interactions that undermine political borders. Policy interventions will therefore need to take cognisance of these processes.

4.2 What remains to be seen is whether initiatives like NEPAD's seven-city programme will provide an opportunity for questioning current modes of governance and generating alternatives. What is clear is that traditional modes of governance cannot adequately respond to the needs of the majority of households in cities. What is also obvious is the resilience of households across the continent, and their ability to adapt in the face of growing poverty and unresponsive governments.

4.3 This is cold comfort to the majority of households in African cities who barely manage to eke out a living, but presents an opportunity for policy makers and governments to provide enabling environments for the flourishing of household survival strategies. The spirit of the NEPAD strategy can certainly be read as wanting to support vulnerable households, including migrants. It is important, however, that governments begin to think outside of the current new public management paradigm, and allow the processes that take place in the city to influence its transformation.

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