Aid’s urban footprint and its implications for local inequality and governance

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Abstract
This paper analyzes how local urban development, and governance therein, are being shaped by the explosion of actors within the donor and investment community in African countries like Mozambique. More specifically, drawing on qualitative fieldwork in Maputo, existing data on aid and private sector flows to Mozambique, and a spatial analysis of new real estate developments between 2009 and 2017, I forward two novel arguments about the negative externalities fostered by the growing density of the community of international development professionals and their foreign private-sector counterparts in the Mozambican capital of Maputo. First, I show that the increasing density of international actors in the capital city and their living needs, as well as how those needs are treated by the public sector, are deepening a housing, infrastructure, and amenities divide between the rentier and international classes in the city and the majority of low-income residents. Second, I contend that the very readiness of non-tax revenue sources from international agents is enabling a continued reliance on external funding, rather than own-source revenues, for major capital investments. This balance in favor of external financing further diminishes the already weak tax bargaining potential of the local population in making demands for urban development projects that directly serve them. In conclusion, I argue that the international development organizations portending an interest in the enhancement of urban equities and fiscal responsibility across cities like Maputo especially need to rethink their operational presence to better address the perverse externalities of their physical and socio-economic imprints on the urban landscapes in which they operate.

Keywords
Urban development, aid, Mozambique, housing, taxation

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Introduction
At a high-level Africa-focused development workshop in 2016, a prominent African economist presented the relevance of Korea and Taiwan’s urban development model for Africa, highlighting before and after photos of Seoul and Taipei which captured how mid-twentieth century slums had been removed to make way for gloriously modern urban housing developments and infrastructure projects. When pressed for an explanation about what happened to residents in Seoul and Taipei’s informal settlements, or asked about differences in the densities and population size of African informal settlements as compared to the historical ones in Asia referenced, the speaker demurred. Workshop discussions quickly turned back to how to leverage African urbanization for industrialization and economic growth.

Development-induced displacement and fair compensation are not especially popular or easy policy topics within the greater twenty-first century narrative of Africa Rising. That narrative instead highlights a shift—largely in non-Africans’ perspectives—about the state of affairs on the continent, from generalizations about chaos and poverty to ones about economic growth and opportunity. The economic opportunities envisioned are reflections of the expectation that rapid urbanization across African countries will couple with rising social and economic infrastructure investments to spur a new wave of industrialization by leveraging technological innovation and the continent’s young demographic profile (UNECA, 2017). Indeed, much of the recent economic scholarship focusing on the continent centers on either calculating the macro-level investments required to address the infrastructure gap and spur industrial growth (Bhattacharya et al., 2012; Foster and Garmendia-Briceno, 2010; Lall et al., 2017; Whitfield et al., 2015), promoting public-private partnerships (among other mechanisms) to fill in fiscal gaps within the public sector’s funding capacities for infrastructure (Collier and Venables, 2016; Foster and Garmendia-Briceno, 2010), creating efficiencies in the local-level provision of housing and services (Henderson et al., 2016; Romer, 2010), or promoting the capacity of African cities to enhance their own-source revenues (Collier et al., 2017; Franzsen and McCluskey, 2017; Turok, 2016). With the exception of Turok’s work on financing urban development across African cities (Turok, 2012, 2016) and that of those working on property taxation reforms across the continent (Collier et al., 2018; Franzsen and McCluskey, 2017), little attention is paid to questions about the equity of who benefits, who pays, and how, for this next big push in growth-oriented activities.

This article is an effort to move toward a more critical, grounded analysis of the financial architecture behind urban development in low-income, urban environments in African countries and its distributive justice implications, taking the capital city of Mozambique as a take-off point. Maputo is one of the most rapidly changing and diverse capital cities in Sub-Saharan Africa, while Mozambique represents one of the lowest-income but fastest growing economies on the continent (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2013; The Business Year, 2014a, 2014b; World Bank, 2014). Since the formal end of its post-independence civil war in 1992, the country—and its capital—have fully embraced a free-market economy and have hosted a growing portfolio of development aid agents, emergency and humanitarian assistance programs, and, since the discovery of natural gas offshore of the country’s northern provinces, increasing foreign investment interests (Hanlon, 2017; Harrison, 2002; Manning, 2015; Morton, 2019; Pitcher, 2002; Plank, 1993; Warren-Rodriguez, 2008). Much of these outside interventions come in as investments in both economic and social infrastructures—from aid for health, education, and capacity building, through to loans for energy, roads, telecommunications, and water systems. The diversity of external interests in these systems, coupled with the central and local government’s own efforts therein, make Maputo an ideal
environment in which to explore how the mixture of the financial architecture behind urban
development in lower-income urban environments across similar capital cities is shaping the
distribution of material benefits from urban development and local governance therein.
Toward this end, I leverage insights culled from 18 months of fieldwork in the
Mozambican capital of Maputo over the period of 2009 to 2015, during which
I conducted repeated, semi-structured interviews with 12 key informants within the munic-
ipal government administration, five officials working on urban development issues at the
national level, and 13 foreign development professionals working across six major bilateral
and multilateral organizations with long-term, active portfolios in Maputo city. In addition,
I used extant data and analyses through 2019 on aid, foreign investment, and public finance,
and complemented this with a spatial analysis of building footprints between 2000 and 2017
to present an in-depth case study of shifts across the urban landscape in Maputo during a
period of extensive growth in physical investments.

I present two arguments about Maputo’s experience that are of wider relevance for other
African capitals hosting diverse and growing foreign interests. First, I show that the physical
footprint of the community of international development professionals and their foreign
national private-sector counterparts is deepening an amenities divide between elite residents
and the majority of the domestic population. This is because of the increasing density of
international actors in the capital city and their living needs, as well as how those needs are
treated by the public sector. In making this argument, I highlight the public sector’s treat-
ment of foreign nationals’ and international organizations’ real estate needs in taxation
legislation, international organizations’ manipulation of local tax codes and local employ-
ees, the recent real estate boom in high-quality housing, and the embeddedness of the rising
middle-class’s financial interests in servicing foreign nationals’ quality-of-life demands.
While aid dependence is not new to critical analyses of development in Mozambique (de
Renzio and Hanlon, 2007; Harrison, 2002; Plank, 1993), I argue that these factors all con-
tribute to producing aid’s particular urban footprint and its related segregation from the
physical realities lived in by Maputo’s urban poor and low-income majority.

Second—and related to the phenomenon of the growing density of aid agents—I find that
because of the very readiness and volume of aid financing, relative to domestic sources of
infrastructure finance, the prioritization of urban development projects is vulnerable to
political economic bargaining between local authorities and external funders, as opposed
to tax-bargaining between residents and local authorities. The former—namely negotiations
with and dependence on foreign actors—is systematic of a self-perpetuating structural aid
dependency which can hinder, as much as advance, social, political, and economic well-
being. At the urban level, the concentration of international donors creates a significant, if
unpredictable, source of non-tax financing for the municipal government. This reality,
I argue, can spur a logic of convenience in public sector decision-making around develop-
ment projects. Municipal decision-makers faced with pressing investment needs rationally
choose the relatively expedient offers of external assistance over aggressively enforcing own-
source revenue reforms—like the modernization of property tax valuation and collection
systems—which lack a strong local political constituency and reference a problematic colo-
nial tax legacy. However, in doing so, local authorities risk embracing an urban develop-
ment agenda that is ultimately more accountable to foreign than domestic nationals.

In the following sections, I first present a picture of Maputo’s financial resources for
urban development, ranging from its own-source revenues through to intergovernmental
transfers and donor assistance at the infrastructure project level. I then provide an account-
ing of the rising density of international stakeholders in Mozambique and their related
physical imprint on Maputo over the past two decades via a spatialized report of the
growing density of high-rise luxury real estate and new gated residential developments across the city since 2000. Given the rents demanded for these types of real estate versus the median household income of Mozambicans living in Maputo, I infer that it is largely the growing need for foreign nationals’ housing and services which is being met by the real estate boom in the city. I further argue that the presence of international organizations within the city’s urban core couples with the strategy of a rentier class in Maputo that receives a major—if not primary—source of income from leasing their central residences to foreigners and/or their organizations, often in foreign currency. The effect of this phenomenon translates into weak political support for the enforcement of property tax reforms which were, perhaps ironically, strongly featured among the projects funded by multilateral aid in the city. I argue that aid’s urban footprint and the growing density of actors therein spurs a logic of convenience in decision-making around urban development and diminishes the potential tax bargaining powers of the wider public. A widening pool of international actors also bolster this dependence on external assistance by providing non-tax revenues in the form of aid or assistance, but also by engaging in their own schemes to avoid local tax payments. In conclusion, I contend that with low own-source revenues, municipal authorities are forced to continue depending on external actors for major capital investments. Further, the lack of an effective tax bargaining tool means the urban poor in Maputo have a deeply delimited portfolio at their disposal to lobby for basic infrastructures that directly benefit them. Infrastructure investment trends from both aid and for-profit agents across other African countries means that Maputo’s experience is likely shared by other capital cities in the region experiencing rapid growth.

The financial architecture of urban development in Maputo

Cities’ financial resources are delimited by the administrative and legal environments in which sub-national entities can operate—some with extensive fiscal autonomy, as in parts of Latin America and South Asia, and some with less fiscal autonomy, as in several countries within Sub-Saharan Africa (Lessmann, 2009; Martinez-Vazquez et al., 2017; Sepulveda and Martinez-Vazquez, 2011). Local governments’ capacity to finance infrastructure projects outside of borrowing funds thus largely depends on inter-governmental transfers from central government authorities (particularly within the African context), external grants or subventions (e.g., from bilateral aid, philanthropies), and their own-source revenues—from sources like property or land taxes, license fees, land sales, and land-value capture (Fjeldstad and Heggstad, 2012; Lall et al., 2017; Paulais, 2012). Urban infrastructure planning across several African cities, particularly outside of South Africa, is notably missing critical parts of this typical financial architecture behind infrastructure development. More specifically, own-source revenues like property and land taxes are major untapped revenues for cities across lower-income countries on the continent (Franzsen and McCluskey, 2017; Slack and Bird, 2015; Turok, 2016; UNCDF and UNDESA, 2016). This is precisely reflected in Maputo’s financial architecture, where the majority of funds typically come not from property taxes but other local fees and taxes as well as intergovernmental transfers.

More specifically, current local tax revenues in Maputo include three types of receipts: fiscal revenues, non-fiscal revenues, and payroll taxes. Within this portfolio, the most important historical streams have been payroll taxes, license fees, and taxes on goods and services. Despite a new national computerized registration system (Sistema de Informação de Registo Predial) launched in 2013 to enhance the property registry’s upkeep and security, the average property tax collected between 2010 and 2014 represented approximately only 10 percent of local tax revenue in Maputo (UNCDF and UNDESA, 2016: 21). By comparison,
property tax revenues in middle- and high-income countries are upwards of fifty percent of local tax revenues. Along with the trend in other African countries, in 2015 for the first time Maputo’s budget anticipated more funds from central government transfers than from its own sources, as shown in Figure 1 below.

While the rise in dependence on central government transfers in Maputo is aligned with the experiences of other municipalities across Africa (Fjeldstad and Heggstad, 2012), this shift was temporary in the Mozambican context because of an economic crisis fueled in part by what has come to be known as the “Tuna Scandal.” That scandal involved an illegal central government executive’s guarantee of sovereign loans from foreign banks to assist with the construction of a private tuna fishing fleet and to secure the country’s coastline (Ilal and Weimer 2018). The financial crises that ensued at the national level meant that by 2017, central government funding for cities across the country experienced declines between 12 and 14 percent (Ilal and Weimer, 2018). In reaction, Maputo’s City Council introduced a public education campaign through social media and posters to alert citizens as per their obligation to pay taxes which have been long evaded or not comprehensively enforced. These include a Municipal Personal Tax (a minimum contribution tax paid by all city residents), an Economic Activity Fee (for commercial activities), a vehicle tax, and, of course, a property tax (which does not include a tax on land, as all land in Mozambique is nationalized).

Nonetheless, despite the ramped up public education campaign on tax obligations, property tax revenues in Maputo are structurally challenged by design. Property tax valuations are legally based on self-reported values, and on potential market values as an alternative, allowing for a great amount of individual discretion and opportunity for under-reporting. In addition, the Mozambican tax code exempts a number of properties from property tax obligations. These include buildings used by the government, public utilities, diplomatic missions, museums and educational institutions, buildings constructed using the country’s Housing Fund, and buildings of officially recognized non-profit organizations. Furthermore, newly constructed buildings receive exemption from property tax obligations for five years (Boex et al., 2011). While such property tax exemptions are common across the globe, Mozambique’s tax-exemption code almost by definition leaves the largest footprint in its capital city. Map 1 below shows the density of tax-exempt properties in Maputo’s business center, where real estate market values are also highest.

While exemptions from the property tax are a traditional tool used by city governments around the world to incentivize redevelopment and construction, their use in a context of very low own-source revenues such as Maputo can be problematic. This is not only because of its concentrated impact in capital cities that host most exempt properties, but also

![Figure 1](image-url). Composition of current revenues from domestic sources (in percentages). Sources: Município de Maputo Conselho Municipal (2005, 2009, 2012, 2015).
because cities like Maputo do not host other financial mechanisms such as a land value capture program or a program for payments in lieu of taxes (or PILOTs), both of which help to recapture fiscal receipts lost to private property owners. The result is a significant loss of potential local revenue for the city, and relatedly, of an important source for leveraging domestic (and locally accountable) finances for critical infrastructure projects. Like the country as a whole, Maputo is instead still dependent on external funding for major urban development and infrastructure projects and capacity-building efforts.

Aid dependency is of course familiar terrain across several Sub-Saharan African countries like Mozambique. However, its articulation at the urban level has significantly diversified over the past three decades. Sidaway and Power (1995) reported that not only was the World Bank’s investments in Mozambique greater than the sum of private foreign capital at the end of the twentieth century, but it was also the largest single property investor at the time. Today, the World Bank remains active—but it is no longer a unique player in the field.
For example, the World Bank’s ProMaputo—a USD 44.45 million municipal assistance program—comprised loans and embedded technical support staff in Maputo’s city administration to devise and implement administrative and fiscal reforms as well as build capacity to improve municipal functions and basic service provision in areas like roadways, water, and sanitation (World Bank, 2013). Traditional donors and international organizations like the German and French development cooperation agencies also have historically provided aid for solid waste management and street mapping, respectively, while UN HABITAT has long provided technical assistance for slum upgrading in the city. However, other major external funding sources have been tapped into to help finance basic urban services as well, bolstered in particular by the rise of South-South cooperation across the continent (Mawdsley 2012; Taylor, 2014). Recent major projects have been financed with relative newcomers on the Maputo scene, including the China Export-Import Bank’s loans for the construction of Maputo’s new international airport, roadways, and what is now the longest suspension bridge on the continent. In addition, other new donors like South Korea have used their own Export-Import Bank to finance a landfill serving both Maputo and neighboring city Matola, now the country’s second largest city (Bismarque, 2013; Chambisso, 2016; Vásconez and Ilal, 2008).

These bilateral aid arrangements are typically accompanied by the arrival of private sector for-profit constituents from bilateral partners’ countries. For example, just as the former Brazilian president Lula da Silva was celebrated for opening new embassies and avenues for Brazilian technical assistance across the continent, one of Brazil’s major mining corporations, Vale, was similarly spreading its engagement—particularly in Lusophone countries like Mozambique (White et al., 2015). Indeed, combined diplomatic and business delegation visits have long been the norm when new embassies have been established. The critical aspect of this phenomenon, however, is the growing density of such ventures in bilateral partnerships across African countries and their capitals in the past decade. Turkey, Argentina, and South Korea all opened new embassies in Maputo after 2010, and all also supported business delegation visits along with the opening of their physical diplomatic posts in the country—encouraging new investment opportunities and partnerships with agents in Maputo (Avril Consulting, 2015; Redacção, 2017). In short, where donors go first, private capital from donor countries follows. The volume of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Mozambique overall is striking testament to this trend away from the World Bank-dominated reality that Sidaway and Power reported in 1995—with FDI growing eight times since 2010, as shown in Figure 2 below. Official development assistance volumes overall from donor countries has remained relatively stagnant in this same period, but the volumes obscure that as traditional aid from Development Assistance Countries (DAC)—comprised largely by high-income countries in Europe and North America—is declining, non-DAC countries like Turkey and Thailand are raising their donor profiles in Mozambique (see Figure 3). 4

This combination of an increasingly dense community of aid agents and their for-profit national counterparts intensifies the physical imprint of foreign nationals active in Mozambique—and especially its capital city, as detailed in the next section. Further, trends across other Sub-Saharan African countries give reason to expect similar realities elsewhere—as private investment in economic infrastructures like energy, communication technologies, and transportation is growing across the region, all while official development assistance remains rather stagnant, if diversifying in its origins (see Figure 4 below).

Despite such growth in investments, in African cities from Maputo through to Addis Ababa, Freetown, Harare, Kampala and more, local authorities and tax scholars bemoan the challenges of tapping into this investment boom through modernizing property taxation.
systems that would strengthen the own-source revenues and, relatedly, the tax bargaining potential for Africa’s urban residents (Bakibinga and Ngabirano, 2019; Grieco et al., 2019; Goodfellow, 2015, 2016; Jibao and Prichard, 2015; Nengeze, 2018; Prichard, 2015). Instead of bolstering the public purse, the clearest manifestation of these latest interests—outside the actual investment projects that partnerships with donors and the private sector bring—is in the residential and commercial space sectors within the city. Just as foreign direct investments have risen and donor agents have densified, scholars working on the continent show that rather than planning for upgrades that serve the urban poor, who remain the majority across several cities, local authorities have promoted designs and plans that trend toward building aspirational architectures, infrastructures, and housing—what Watson (2014) and others have termed “fantasy plans” (Cain, 2014, 2017; Watson, 2009; Watson and Agbola, 2013).

Figure 2. Trends in Net ODA and FDI Stock (1995–2017).
Sources: FDI figures are from the Statistical Annexes of the UNCTAD World Investment Report 2019 and Net ODA figures are from OECD (2019), OECD International Development Statistics (database).

Figure 3. Official development assistance to Mozambique from DAC and non-DAC Countries (2013–2017).
Source: Net ODA figures are from OECD (2019), OECD International Development Statistics (database).
For whom the city booms

Historically, Maputo’s urban center, or “cement city”, has been demarcated by the singularity of hosting the majority of the city’s high-rise apartment buildings, hotels, and office spaces, a physical legacy of Portuguese regulations segregating neighborhoods (and people) by the use of building materials. It was only in this core of the colonial capital of Lourenço Marques (now Maputo), where Europeans settled, that the use of cement as a building material was legal. During the post-civil war period in the 1990s, Maputo began to see the re-emergence of capital investments across the city, but these were very much linked to the dictates of the aid industry, as Hanlon (1991) described. Two decades later, Paasche and Sidaway (2010: 1573) reflected on the city’s emergence as a fragmented space of micro-secure enclaves, describing what began as “a fortification of the individual and the household and the purchase of security in multiple private and semiprivate microspaces.” Today, what Bertelsen et al. (2013) described as the hegemonic discourses of “formal” and “informal” bear little reference to the more dynamic variations therein across Maputo’s neighborhoods. However, the demarcation of “secure” and “modern” spaces is expanding and aggregating, driven by real estate speculation and the growth and redevelopment of high-end buildings at greater scales—both vertical and horizontal.

In Maputo city’s south, for example, a new landmark suspension bridge which promised to bring water, energy, and economic development to the rural and relatively poorer district of KaTembe in the city, instead is serving to accelerate displacement and leverage new real estate investments to help pay for construction debts (Carolini, 2017; Otsuki, 2019). Social media accounts from onlookers show how local street vendors who have attempted to utilize the new bridge and accompanying roads to sell their wares have been harassed by local police, citing mandates from the city prohibiting commercial activities on these sites which instead serve a vehicle-owning population that drives by and over the bridge to a “new” frontier for urban real estate in the KaTembe district. While the vision plan for KaTembe signals the development of housing as the major target of construction on the majority of the district’s land area, the plan’s images reference golf courses and nautical clubs, giving an

Figure 4. Commitments to economic infrastructures in Sub-Saharan Africa (2005–2017). Source: OECD.Stats and Preqin financial database.
indication of whom the new housing developments will and will likely not accommodate (Betar, n.d.)

Stretching from the city center toward the city’s north is another, longer-standing build-up of housing enclaves—one amplifying and extending the micro-security enclaves Paasche and Sidaway (2010) spotlighted a decade ago. While some of this expansion reflects the demand from the Mozambican middle-class and political elites (Sumich, 2018; Sumich and Nielsen, 2020), the advertisements for new well-appointed residences across the “cement” city center line into northern “suburbios” and peri-urban neighborhoods, like Triunfo in the Costa do Sol area, are often in English and prices quoted in US Dollars and Euros. These same neighborhoods were once largely low-income, and while Maputo’s GDP per capita is estimated to be more than three times the national GDP per capita (which stood at under $400 USD in 2016), very few Mozambican families are able to afford these luxury homes in newly wealthy Maputo enclaves. The central “cement” neighborhoods of Polana, or northern expanding neighborhoods of Sommerschield 1, 2, and Triunfo, today host posh residences with some of the city’s highest rents, asking for over MZN 400,000 (or over $6,000 USD) a month, as highlighted in Figure 5 below.

Across these neighborhoods north and south of the city, there has been a near constant hum of construction over the past decade, with Spanish and Chinese construction companies holding agreements to build additional housing in the city (The Business Year, 2014a). Map 2 below highlights some of this growth in new private buildings built in the city center and northern neighborhoods between 2000 and 2017. One of the developments therein is the much celebrated design of the Torres Rani Towers, completed in 2017. The towers are the product of a joint investment venture between the Dubai-based Rani Investment, a hospitality and real estate firm, and the Thailand-based Minor Hotel Group, also a hospitality and leisure firm. The development hosts 224,000 square feet of office space as well as more

Figure 5. Examples of recent rents for three-bedroom condos.
Source: Author’s elaboration based on August 2017 survey of three-bedroom rental units database on http://casamozambique.co.mz, the most popular online real estate site in the city. In August 2017, currency rates were 1 USD = 61 MZN.
than 180 furnished and serviced residences with secured parking and retail services (Mutemba, 2017). At its opening, the Torres Rani complex already boasted occupancy in 63 of its units (Mutemba, 2017). There is little imagination required to see that these residences are catered to those whom might not be in Maputo for the long haul, for whom security is paramount, and for whom there may be little wish or need to furnish a home or leave the complex. The residences are far from becoming a home to the average Mozambican households—90 percent of which cannot access credit for the purchase of a home according to the national Bank of Mozambique (Fijamo, 2020).

Different explanations help account for the growth of such new higher-end housing developments across Maputo. Research on the real estate boom in major cities from Ethiopia and Nigeria through Tanzania, for example, touches on how the sector often presents a mechanism for money laundering and political corruption (Goodfellow, 2017; Owens, 2014; Page, 2020; Shelley, 2013). There is good reason to suspect that political elites in Maputo, like those across other capital cities studied, are leveraging real estate development in the city for personal rents. For example, a recent crackdown on corruption within

Map 2. New construction (in blue) in Maputo’s urban core and north 2010–2017. Source: Adaptation of base map of Maputo from Google and of the “cement city” from the Direcção Municipal de Planeamento Urbano e Ambiente – Conselho Municipal de Maputo, based on comparison of satellite imagery from 2010 through 2017.
the Mozambican National Social Security Institute exposed how high-level ministers were receiving kickbacks for their awarding of real estate construction contracts (Beúla, 2018, 2019). Such high-level corruption in real estate investments, however, is not delimited to development sites in Maputo alone, and indeed often reference the natural resource-rich Northern provinces of Mozambique that can escape the public and international scrutiny of investments in the capital. Here then I explore another vector of the phenomena which remains understudied—namely, whose demand the capital city’s boom speaks to and how the presence of the international development industry itself—and the international business ventures it encourages—help shape that demand and the development of differentiated housing markets, often operating under dual pricing markets. It is, for example, during the same time period, particularly over the past decade, that Mozambique saw tremendous growth in private investments and in bilateral relations, while its capital city also witnessed an explosion of real estate developments—and high rents therein—that speak to perceived needs for security and modern (often furnished) housing amenities.

Studies of the spatial forms and production of cities which hosts a large community of international professionals are not entirely new. For example, Mamadouh et al. (2015) explore the clustering of embassies and international diplomacy spaces in The Hague, noting the spatial security measures these sites require. Of particular interest here, the scholars argue that future scholarship should “consider the residential and consumption patterns of diplomatic personnel and their roles in the reproduction of transnational and elite city spaces and services, from international schools to high-end restaurants” (Mamadouh et al., 2015: 571). In lower-income contexts like Mozambique, the textures of these spatial patterns of inequality are especially acute and visible. In relatively small capital cities like Maputo, office spaces are rather densely settled in the urban core, and residential pockets of material wealth both co-locate while also expanding outward from the urban core into securitized enclaves. These developments contrast sharply with the spatial imprints of material poverties traditionally located in urban peripheries of cities like Maputo—lands that are now in competition with the demand for well-appointed housing.

The housing demand from foreign workers in Maputo, whom are typically paid in foreign currencies, has several implications. One is that local professionals and elites with modern housing to supply—particularly in the cement core or within easy commutes to this center—are able to capture rents from what Hanlon (1997) early on called the “recolonization of the cement city.” It is the density, however, of international business and development organizations in Maputo’s city center that has markedly changed since the time that scholars like Hanlon first described the dilemma of Mozambicans being essentially pushed out of their own city and its (and the country’s) management, or others like Simon (1992) wrote about the emergence of aid-dependent polities. Indeed, while the elite Torres Rani Towers house 180 secured and furnished residences, there are several more modest but relatively high-priced units around the city available from Mozambican property-owners who leverage the rental income from their own city center homes to build newer residences in Maputo’s outskirts, or subúrbios, where there is more land availability and a growing middle-class (Morton, 2019; Roque et al., 2016; Sambo, 2016). As Morton (2013) explains, this income generation strategy is born out of a history of struggle to survive in the city center during the civil war period in the 1980s, when life in Maputo was typified by haphazard or absent basic services—even in the relatively well-developed cement city. During that period, apartments abandoned by the Portuguese in Maputo’s poshest central neighborhoods after independence were allocated by the new FRELIMO-run government—rent free—to government employees and military who fought for independence. Those who managed to survive the difficulties of life in the city during the immediate
post-independence period and to maintain their residences in Maputo’s center profited from the growing rental value of their homes as new international stakeholders arrived during the period of market reforms in Mozambique in the 1990s (Morton, 2019). The demand for office space and housing by international stakeholders—from the multilateral financial institutions and bilateral donors through to international non-governmental organizations—since the end of the civil war and the explosion of free-market reforms in the last decade of the 20th century created an easy income strategy that has only become stronger with the more recent arrival of a diversifying class of international interests represented by an uptick in foreign investors since 2010, coupled with the growth of bilateral relationships. As in other rising middle-class urban societies, in this context, there is little incentive for the propertied class of Mozambican nationals in Maputo to push for fiscal reforms that promote updated property taxation systems (Kingombe, 2014). Such reforms would only diminish their rents.

Yet little of the construction buzz described here is acknowledging or accommodating the more significant affordable housing demands of the urban poor, who represent at least 75 percent of the population in Maputo. Public policies have promised much but delivered little in the struggle for affordable housing in Maputo, as well as Mozambique as a whole. Current Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi promised to build 35,000 new homes between 2015 and 2019, but the construction process has already shown that this ambitious goal is beyond current capacities. In 2016, the national Economic and Social Plan (Plano Econômico e Social—PES) targeted the construction of 1,775 new houses in the largely rural provinces of Tete, Zambézia, and Cabo Delgado, but only 268 houses were actually built (Caldeira, 2017a). Despite this shortfall, in 2017 Nyusi again extended the promise of State-constructed homes throughout the country, promising to build an extraordinary 138,000 new homes over the next 12 years using the Housing Development Fund (Fundo para o Fomento de Habitação –FFH) in a new initiative called the Integrated Program for the Massive Construction of Social Housing (Programa Integrado de Construção Massiva de Habitação Social – PICMHS). Critics note that at least $989 million USD would be needed for the realization of that number of new houses—a budget which the national accounts do not include and which international donors are not targeting. Furthermore, while 60 percent of the homes are meant to be for Mozambicans earning the equivalent of roughly $780 to $3900 USD a year, the personal home mortgages required to make these homes accessible to such a population do not exist (Caldeira, 2017b). As aforementioned, even Maputo’s middle-class residents are increasingly being pushed out of the city center by the high-end capture of the city’s housing core; instead they seek affordable shelter in less serviced but increasingly commodified peripheral or peri-urban neighborhoods (Jenkins, 2013; Sumich and Nielsen, 2020).

**Cultivating a logic of convenience: International complicity in stagnating urban autonomy**

Rampant evasion or underpayment of property taxes, weak collection efforts, and the slowness of updating the property cadaster propagate Maputo’s fiscal dependence on other sources of revenue for urban development projects—including intergovernmental transfers and international development aid. The availability of international capital particularly is a balm for municipal authorities like those in Maputo who are as aware of local housing and infrastructural needs as they are of local financial resource scarcity. International partnerships with longstanding foreign partners are prized by city authorities in Maputo for their
predictability and regularity. Maputo City Council’s Head of International Relations, Natacha Morais, and her colleague, Chadreque Massingue, for example, celebrated Maputo’s cooperation partnership with the city of Barcelona, positioning it as the city’s strongest relationship with a foreign stakeholder. They explained that Barcelona’s support was based on assistance that is programmed into Barcelona’s own budget by law, annually. Barcelona, like other levels of government in Spain, apports 0.7% of its annual budget for international assistance programs, making its support for cooperation projects in Maputo much more predictable than that of other partners whose aid commitments are more variable. Felip Roca Blasco, then Director of International Relations and Cooperation for Barcelona, in turn explained that the city’s aid strategy was to couple with other extant cooperation relationships, for example, between civil society groups. Few partners—and few own-source revenues—lay claim to this type of budgetary predictability, however. Morais complained that it is not possible to actually plan in Maputo because of the lack of budget predictability—excepting contributions like Barcelona’s. In other words, even while plans are made, planning is a meaningless exercise—save for projects for which the city knows or can predict foreign assistance. Instead of implementing plans then, the city rationally employs a logic of convenience and implements that for which foreign assistance is most readily available.

The turn to international aid as the mainstay of financing key urban development projects may be practical from authorities’ perspectives, but it also delimits what taxation scholars globally argue is a key bargaining tool for the public to make political demands. Prichard (2015) details the different but important causal pathways that connect taxation with government responsiveness and accountability in Ghana, Kenya, and Ethiopia. These pathways are dependent or relate to a number of both structural and contextual factors. Prichard (2015: 70–77) argues that the most intuitive and straightforward structural influence on the public’s potential for tax bargaining—or its capacity to secure concessions from government—is the revenue pressure that governments face, which in turn is determined by a government’s access to non-tax revenue. In Mozambique, and Maputo more specifically, access to non-tax revenue in the form of international assistance is strong, and couples with other structural and contextual factors that weaken tax bargaining potential. Critically, these latter factors include the lack of strong civil society organizations (independent of linkages with the ruling political party, FRELIMO), the oppression of government critics, and the historical legacy of Mozambique’s socialist government. As a planning scholar at the University of Eduardo Mondlane related, after Mozambique won independence from Portugal, the FRELIMO government had little inclination to tax the public, as doing so was reminiscent of Portuguese colonial rule and its forms of taxation (or compulsory labor). Indeed, scholars of former Portuguese African colonies have long argued that tax collection in the post-colonial period has been just as difficult as during the colonial period, and that this reflects a specific strategy among elite African leaders who understand the options that non-tax revenues afford them (Havik et al., 2015). The national government’s budget under FRELIMO, for example, largely depends on revenues from customs duties on exported raw materials, in addition to foreign aid and loans. However, tax and development research has long argued that this route of revenue generation comes at the price of building a robust and independent own-revenue resource base that is directly accountable to the public rather than external stakeholders (Bräutigam and Knack, 2004; Bräutigam et al., 2008; UN-Habitat, 2013; Prichard, 2015b).

While the challenges of effective local taxation are clearly rooted in local governance dynamics and the persistence of incentives to avoid the pursuit of tax revenues, what is typically obscured in scholarly discussions therein is how international actors are also
engaged in tax avoidance and can perversely stymie the advancement of reforms. Foreign technicians or consultants working on international cooperation projects in Maputo are obliged to pay ten percent tax on their incomes by Mozambican law. However, Morais and Massingue recounted how Portuguese partners, with which the city of Maputo had had several cooperation projects, tried to have the city’s Office of International Relations intervene with tax authorities on their behalf to cancel the ten percent payment. They also reported that other cooperation agencies – like the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) used loopholes in the system to avoid having their consultants pay the ten percent tax. Instead, JICA (and others) listed consultants or technical staff on specific cooperation projects as “diplomats” of the Japanese embassy, thereby creating tax immunity for them. Morais quipped that on the one hand, donors attempt tax evasion, and on the other hand, donors tell Mozambican government officials they need to do a better job with tax collection.

Maputo City Council’s Director of Urban Planning and the Environment, Luis Nhaca, spoke of two other ways that internal negotiations with international stakeholders negatively shape municipal government capacities to implement projects in the city. The first is the seemingly basic rule of project procurements. According to Nhaca, different procurement rules used by the increasing multitude of international partners can result in losses of project efficiency and effectiveness when rules are unclear and inflexible. He described how in a trilateral cooperation project in Maputo’s Chamanculo neighborhood with Brazil, Italy, and the Cities Alliance, there are effectively four funders (including Maputo city government itself)—each with its own procurements rules, modes of financial disbursements, and different organizational mandates. The coordination of different players creates project implementation delays and political complexities that could be diminished if international partners all agreed to at least use Mozambique’s own procurements rules. Nhaca lamented that development cooperation partners rarely agree to do so in Maputo. Scholarship across other geographies where aid organizations are active suggests that a lack of coordination among donor operations in the urban space is not singular to Mozambique. Essex (2016), for example, discusses this very challenge within the context of Jakarta, where the capabilities required for donor coordination are challenged both by structures and practices within donor organizations themselves as well as the complex urban systems in which they work—characterized by land speculation, infrastructure gaps, and more. Interestingly, in Maputo Nhaca positioned the World Bank’s rules as a favored alternative, given that their procurement procedures are, at the very least, familiar to staff in Maputo’s various city secretaries.

Nhaca also noted that while capacity building is a popular objective of many internationally funded projects in Maputo, peculiarly, international project partners resist contracting local municipal functionaries for project work that Nhaca insisted they are qualified to perform both intellectually and technically. Instead, foreign cooperation partners contract outside consultancies, typically employing foreigners, to complete project-related tasks. The employment of foreign consultants, in effect, then crowds-out municipal authorities’ own capacity building. Morais also regarded the hiring of foreign, as opposed to domestic, professionals as a challenge in working with international development partners. She explained that international partners typically do not wish to contract municipal functionaries because they expect those functionaries to complete work on the project in their capacity as functionaries—thereby avoiding paying municipal staff more than their extant salaries for work on a project. For example, Japan refused to pay Maputo’s municipal staff for what locals considered to be overtime on a recycling project Japan is running with the city. Municipal staff complained that Japanese partners did not respect Mozambican law, which indicates that the end of the workday for public sector employees is 3 pm. Japanese
partners, for their part, felt their agreement on the scope of work should be considered a part of municipal staff’s basic functions, even if that meant working beyond 3 pm. Nhaca argues that allowing municipal staff to take on consultancies beyond their typical workday—receiving compensation in addition to their base salaries—would motivate their work on projects, build capacities, and result in reduced costs for international partners, since local staff could be hired at considerably cheaper rates than international consultants. However, there is little movement among international partners in Maputo toward this idea. A logic of convenience, in short, is also functioning among international partners who find it easier to push fiscal reforms, rather than to implement them internally.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I argue that the growing density of international aid, accompanied by adjoining foreign private sector investments, in Mozambique is creating negative externalities within the country’s capital city, Maputo. Foreign actors’ housing and infrastructure needs are deepening housing and related amenity disparities in the city. The density of foreign actors is also reinforcing the local government’s dependence on external, non-tax revenue funding for major urban development projects. Further, as local authorities in Maputo themselves identify, international partners often attempt to evade local taxes themselves, despite the international community’s parallel efforts to improve local tax revenue systems in the city. These perversities on the ground mean that local residents in Maputo who fall outside of the propertied class are even farther from being afforded the opportunity of tax bargaining than tax reform advocates think. It is not, for example, simply that local governance dynamics and corruption curtail the advancement of fiscal autonomy. It is also the very particular—and perverse—role and presence of the international community of development practitioners and their private-sector counterparts that enables and helps build the very rational logics behind why local authorities continue to depend on foreign funds to launch major capital investments.

The shift from a social contract between government and local residents to a financial contract between government and foreign agents, however, is problematic for deepening democracy and urban autonomy. While the evidence presented here is from Maputo, it is likely that other African capital cities with low own-source revenue generation and high participation of foreign actors—from both the donor and private sector communities—are experiencing similar phenomena on the ground, with the densification and growth of dual housing markets and high-end housing coupled with infrastructures that primarily serve those higher-end communities. The deep perversity of this phenomenon is that some of the same actors—namely international donors—promoting equitable urban development in name are in practice aggravating urban inequalities through their own footprint in the city, the convenient decision-making logics they bolster with regard to their own taxation, and their own operational and employment strategies. To be certain, they are not alone; private capital, whether foreign or domestic, plays a key role in the evolution of material inequalities across Maputo. The difference is that these latter groups do not make it their business to promote sustainable and equitable development in the same way that the aid community does.

The international and bilateral development industry is no stranger to criticism. However, its internal modes of operation on the ground and its own physical needs typically escape the kinds of critical analyses that have effectively deconstructed the developmentalist and often neoliberal rationales that guide aid interventions on the ground. The real estate boom over the past decade and the dual housing markets catering to so many foreign
nationals across cities like Maputo make legible the material role of development professionals in the persistence of unevenness in the production of spaces across low-income environments. Especially within capital cities, the diversification and density of the industry of development professionals and their private sector counterparts point to a need for internal reform within organizations that lay claim to goals like fostering sustainable and equitable development in low-income environments.

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Notes

1. The author was a participant in the workshop, which was hosted at a university on 6–7 June 2016.
2. The *Africa Rising* tagline was born with a series of publications from news and magazine organizations like The Economist, which published a cover story of the same name in December 2011.
3. Land-value capture has been a very significant source of municipal income across Latin America, particularly in Brazil. PILOTs are popular in the United States, allowing cities to regain much of the tax-income they otherwise lose by law because of the abundance of tax-exempt organizations that own buildings in the city.
4. Critically, among non-DAC countries, China’s data is not included as China does not participate in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s aid surveys, from which ODA data here is gathered. If China were included, the non-DAC country portfolio of aid to Mozambique would be much larger.
5. Much has been written about the dualism and segregation of urban life in Maputo from colonial to the post-colonial present era, distinguishing the cement city from “suburbios” (i.e. neighborhoods just outside the city center) and peri-urban areas on the outermost border of the city limits (Barros et al., 2014; Jenkins, 2000, 2001, 2013; Morton, 2013; Sambo, 2016).
6. GDP per capita in 2016 is based on calculations of GDP in Mozambique by IMF Staff. Housing prices and trends were reported in the real estate industry news (*The Business Year*, 2014b, 2014a).
7. Figure 5 highlights rents in the city’s neighborhoods where luxury real estate developments have been concentrating. Neighborhoods where the majority of the urban poor live unsurprisingly did not have rental listings uploaded onto the cited real estate brokerage’s website.
8. FRELIMO—or the Mozambican Liberation Front—has been the ruling political party in Mozambique since winning the war for independence from Portugal in 1975.
9. Government statistics typically underestimate urban poverty figures according to Mitlin and Satterthwaite (2013). The figure I use here is thus from the Cities Alliance, which has been working on urban development issues in the city since 2002 (Cities Alliance, 2011).
10. Interview in Maputo, 7 July 2014.
11. Interview in Maputo, 8 July 2014.
12. Interview in Maputo, Professor João Tique.
13. Interviews with Nhaca in Maputo occurred on several occasions between 2012-2017; when I first spoke with him, he was the Secretary of Finance, but later landed in his position as Director of Urban Planning. He is presently working with the Mozambican Association of Municipalities.
14. Interview in Maputo City Hall on 15 July 2014.
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