Urban Service Delivery in Africa and the Role of International Assistance

Richard Stren*

Sub-Saharan African cities have been growing at historically unprecedented rates. Since the early 1970s, they have received considerable international assistance, involving a succession of major thematic objectives. The main agency involved in urban assistance has been the World Bank. But as its goals have changed, it has been obliged to operate increasingly through a decentralised, more democratically structured local-government system. Overall, the success of this international-assistance regime has been positive but modest, given the overwhelming needs of African cities. Still, African cities are increasingly finding solutions both co-operatively and on their own.

Key words: African cities, decentralisation, local government, urban assistance, urban management, World Bank

1 Introduction

For the last several decades, cities in sub-Saharan Africa have been growing at historic rates. At the same time, since most of these cities are very poor, they have not been able to keep up with the need to provide the most essential services to the bulk of their people. Consequently, many governments have relied on international institutions for project and programme support. Even though the urban sector receives less attention than other development priorities, foreign aid in this area, particularly in Africa,\(^1\) has been considerable since the 1970s. What have been the key features of international interventions in the urban sector over the last four decades and how successful has donor assistance been at addressing critical challenges in African cities?

This article addresses these questions by showing that international urban assistance in Africa has gone through a number of distinct phases, each of which reflects larger development ideas important during that time period. Specifically, urban interventions have evolved from a singular emphasis on ‘sites and services’ housing projects to a focus on urban management and decentralisation to a more holistic approach grounded in the tenets of ‘good governance’. Over time, there has been significant learning among donors not only from their successes and failures but also from the priorities advanced by recipient-country governments.

In order to contextualise the importance of the donor community to Africa’s urban development, the article first provides an overview of key characteristics of African urbanisation and highlights variations in local government and urban management across the region. Subsequently, it discusses one of the key hindrances to improved urban service

\(^*\)Professor Emeritus of Political Science, University of Toronto (restren@gmail.com).

\(^1\) Hereafter, ‘Africa’ refers to sub-Saharan Africa.
delivery in Africa, which is the low level of revenue at the municipal level. In turn, this has increased the relevance of international donor agencies operating in the urban sector, in particular the World Bank. The evolution in interventions by various donors over time illustrates a growing preference for demand-driven approaches and a greater recognition of the value of donor co-ordination.

2 Urbanisation in Africa

According to the 2011 revision of the World Urbanization Prospects, 36.7% of Africans live in urban areas (UN Population Division, 2012). Although this is relatively low by international standards, African cities have been growing rapidly for some time. For instance, the average annual rate of urban growth from 2005 to 2010, across over 40 countries, is estimated at 3.71% – one of the highest levels of urban growth in the world. By comparison, the equivalent rate for China during the same period was estimated at 2.62% while cities in Latin America, Europe, and North America were growing at 1.60%, 0.40%, and 1.31% a year, respectively (UN Population Division, 2010).

Figure 1: SSA GNI/capita and urbanisation levels, 2009

Sources: UN Population Division (2010); World Bank (2010a: 378–9).

2. By contrast, Europe is 72.9%, North America 82.2% and Latin America and the Caribbean 79.1% urban in the same year (UN Population Division, 2012).
A very low level of urbanisation, combined with a high rate of urban growth, can correlate with low levels of gross national income (GNI) per capita. This is indeed the case in Africa where, at US$885 per capita annually, GNI figures are among the lowest of any world region (World Bank, 2010a: 379). While there is no clearly delineated causal relationship between levels of urbanisation and economic growth, the two measures are positively related, as Figure 1 illustrates.

Other studies show that, as levels of urbanisation rise, so do national income and economic growth. Although these studies do not establish the direction of causation, ‘they do show that the association between urban and national economic growth is robust and worthy of attention’ (Montgomery et al., 2003: 304). But as Polèse (2009) demonstrates in detail, while urbanisation takes place, many countries – including many in the developing world – can sustain a very high level of urbanisation without levels of wealth corresponding to what might be expected in more developed countries. For African cities to become more productive, they need – among other things – to improve the level of effective infrastructure and service delivery to all their citizens.

2.1 ‘Slumming it’ in African cities

Urbanisation, then, may be associated with economic growth, but it does not immediately lead to economic development. Indeed, as countries become more urbanised the lag between urbanisation and development may be considerable. This lag can be seen vividly in the size of the low-income population in many developing-country cities. Although some of these cities – particularly in Africa – experience very high rates of growth, much of that growth seems to be absorbed by the rise of ‘slums’ and informal housing. Slums are defined as ‘a multidimensional concept involving … poor housing, overcrowding, lack of services and insecure tenure’ (UN-Habitat, 2003: 1). According to this report, as of 2001, ‘… 924 million people, or 31.6% of the world’s urban population, lived in slums. The majority of them were in the developing regions … Within the developing regions, sub-Saharan Africa had the largest proportion resident in slums in 2001 (71.9%)’ (ibid.: xxv). The report further argued that, just as the number of slum dwellers had grown substantially since the 1990s, it was projected to grow to ‘about 2 billion if no firm and concrete action is taken’ (ibid.).

Following this ground-breaking report, a number of prominent writers expanded on the issues of urban poverty and insecurity. In Planet of Slums, Davis (2006) excoriates the international financial institutions for their role, via structural adjustment programmes, in creating the preconditions for a severe deterioration in urban services. In Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, a New Urban World, Neuwirth (2005) argues that the international agencies have been seriously out of touch with the reality on the ground for much of the world’s urban poor. Both books suggest that the future of Third World cities will be dominated by ‘slums’ and ‘squatters’. The work of these two authors, and others like them, has influenced the continued focus on this aspect of the urban condition as a touchstone of what needs to be improved.

Nevertheless, more recent aggregate statistics tell a more complicated and even hopeful story. New calculations by UN-Habitat (2008) in the period from 1990 to 2010
indicate that, while the share of Africa’s total population living in cities increased during this period, the proportion of the region’s urban population living in slums actually decreased, from 70% to 61.7%. Extrapolating these trends indicates a steady decline through to the year 2030, with Africa’s slum population diminishing to approximately 53% of the total urban population in the sub-region. Thus, this statistical information suggests neither disaster nor the complete disappearance of slums in the proximate future but rather a slow improvement in living conditions as more and more people move to, and settle permanently in, the cities of Africa (UN-Habitat, 2008: 179).

3 African cities: from local government to urban management

How have African governments coped with these tendencies of rapid city growth, persistent poverty, and the intransigent establishment of very large areas of unserviced, insecure, and informal areas of housing? There are a number of trends, one of the most important of which was the movement in structure from local government in the 1960s and 1970s to urban management in the 1980s and 1990s (Stren, 2004). To put this succinctly, emphasis moved from a focus on the structures, powers, and functions of local government in the early years after independence, to a focus on the management of urban services, including transport, garbage disposal, housing, water supply, and street cleaning. The provision of such services became increasingly challenging due to the increase in the numbers of Africans living in seriously underserviced (i.e. ‘slum’) conditions.

The details of this transformation are further complicated by the legacies of colonial rule. Out of 47 African countries on the World Bank list, 35 are either former British or former French colonial territories. At the outset, the differences were quite clear. By the mid-1960s, for example, the town and city councils in anglophone countries each comprised elected councillors and a mayor elected by the sitting councilors, as well as a professional civil service with department heads under the management of a town clerk with a relatively wide range of local powers. Ultimate control over the senior officials as well as the financing of the local body were left to the minister of local government at the national, or provincial/State, level. The francophone equivalent was a communal structure similar to that found in France, with an executive mayor responsible to the national Minister of the Interior, elected representatives, a small number of departments, and a relatively limited range of service responsibilities. Until the 1990s, most major services in a typical francophone city were carried out either by agencies of the central government or by semi-autonomous local agencies supported by large multinational corporations (Stren, 1989). The organisational and institutional structure in both groups of countries was relatively simple.

Over time, African countries reformed their systems of urban government in an idiosyncratic fashion. As this happened, individual systems became more and more complex. The examples of Nairobi, Kenya and Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire are instructive in this regard. During the 1980s, Nairobi had a budget of US$68 million compared with US$47 m. in Abidjan. In addition, Nairobi employed approximately 16,908 workers and professionals compared with only 2,150 in Abidjan. Nevertheless, Abidjan contained a wealthier population and enjoyed a higher level of public services. The cities differed in five major ways. First, in Abidjan, many major services, such as electricity and water supply and
garbage removal, were contracted out to private companies, thus removing their employees from the public roll. Second, there was a metropolitan system in Abidjan consisting of a central government, known as the government of ‘The City of Abidjan’, and ten lower-level communal governments. Third, the finances of Abidjan were directly controlled from the centre (Stren, 1989: 26–7). Fourth, during most of the 1980s, Nairobi was governed by a centrally-appointed commission, with no elected positions, presumably to ‘cleanse’ its operations. Finally, while local taxes in most anglophone cities were collected and dispensed locally, francophone cities retained the French system of national tax collection whereby local taxes (property taxes, business taxes and fees) are collected by a national agency and deposited into a single national account, to be allocated thereafter to the commune or city government upon request. During the 1980s and 1990s, the reliability of these payments from the central-government account could not be assured in some countries.

The historical experiences of countries like Mozambique or Angola (lusophone), Ethiopia (with a non-colonial past) and South Africa (with a past history almost unique in Africa in terms of colonial influences), add a range of variation that is much greater than the anglophone/francophone distinction would suggest. The evolution in local governance in South Africa is particularly notable. Until South Africa removed its apartheid laws and organised democratic elections in 1994, its cities were virtually isolated from the rest of the African continent. Yet, after the end of apartheid, the publication of a new constitution, and the election of new local governments in 1995 and 1996, the governance of South African cities began to attract serious attention elsewhere in Africa. At the same time, creating democratic local-governance structures in South Africa to involve all groups in the population emphasised the importance of policies to deal with the very large urban informal sector, which is predominantly dominated by the black African population (Swilling, 1997: 215). This policy emphasis connects South African cities much more closely than before with other African cities even if South African cities are, comparatively, much richer in terms of both human and material resources.

Today, the design of local-government institutions has been further influenced by the adoption of decentralisation policies in most African countries. These policies have given more powers to cities and local governments since the 1980s (Stren and Eyoh, 2007), even though financial support for cities is still weak. African municipal leaders, both elected and non-elected, also have many more opportunities to meet, and to share and discuss their common problems, than was the case in the past. For example, the Africities meeting of mayors and local-government specialists is now held every three years on a regular basis. At a recent meeting in Marrakech in 2010, there were some 5,000 participants (Cities Alliance, 2012). Institutional innovations in one country will be noticed in others, with the result that – even though similar structures are rare from country to country – other countries will consider how best to handle the same problems.

3. Following the same approach, the City Council of Dar es Salaam, Nairobi’s neighbour to the south, was placed under the control of a commission from 1996 to 2000.
4 Urban ‘good governance’ in a challenging environment: weak finances, uneven services

Since the 1990s, African urban policies have been heavily influenced by the notion of ‘good governance’. For much of the urban-policy community, this means a focus on transparent, accountable and efficient local institutions, with an emphasis (for some donors) on the elimination of corruption. It has also gone hand in hand with legislation favouring decentralisation from the national to the local level in many countries. Notwithstanding the evolution of urban structures since Independence, which has resulted in more formal powers for cities, an increasingly complex management system, and at least a rhetorical commitment to decentralisation in most countries, cities in Africa still remain severely limited by the resources they have available to carry out their essential mandate: to provide reliable local services to their growing populations at a cost that reflects ability to pay. In fact, despite a general commitment to decentralisation on the part of most African countries from the mid-1980s through the early 1990s, genuine decentralisation has in most countries not been very evident. A ‘stocktaking’ exercise based on the experience of specialists in 30 African countries showed that the pace of decentralisation was sluggish at best (see Ndegwa, 2002). The data showed only ‘a moderate degree of decentralisation in the Africa region for the 30 countries for which data was complete and analysed ... On a scale of 0 to 4.5, with 0 indicating the lowest level of decentralisation and 4 the highest level possible, only two countries (South Africa and Uganda) scored in the top range (3.0–4.0)’ (ibid.: 12).

This ‘moderate’ level of decentralisation in African countries is only one part of the policy environment of African cities. As they grow, their finances strain to maintain, let alone develop, enough services and infrastructure to support a very large population. Based on studies of ten major African cities (Accra, Addis Ababa, Bamako, Dakar, Dar es Salaam, Johannesburg, Kampala, Kigali, Maputo, and Ouagadougou), with populations varying from 779,000 (Kigali) to 3,888,180 (Johannesburg), the revenue base was – except for Johannesburg – very limited. From municipal budgets available for the years 2007–9, the aggregate annual per capita revenues for these major cities range from a high of US$701.89 in Johannesburg to as low as US$5.70 in Bamako (see Table 1). Since South African cities are outliers in terms of revenue and levels of expenditure, the nine remaining cities average around US$32.93 per person (Ayenew, 2010; Cameron, 2010; Diop, 2010a, b and c; Kironde, 2010; Nach Mback, 2010a and b; Nansozi, 2010; Shenga, 2010).

This low level of expenditures for African cities has persisted for many years. In 1998, a major World Bank study observed that the largest cities of francophone West Africa, such as Abidjan, Dakar and Douala, had a revenue of US$20 per person, while many smaller capital cities had revenue of US$4 to US$6 and secondary cities less than US$2 per person (Farvacque-Vitkovic and Godin, 1998: 68). While these figures have climbed in the intervening years, they are still very low in comparison with other regions. For example, the Municipality of Sao Paulo in Brazil, which has a population of 11,254,503, collected a total revenue of US$1,266 per person as of 2010 (Brazil, 2011). The municipality of Mumbai, with a population of approximately 13,000,000 in 2012, projected a budgetary revenue of some $372 per person for that year (Mumbai, 2013).

The low level of revenues per person in African cities (outside of South Africa) is not simply just a function of their low aggregate national incomes. If this were the case, then
urban revenue could be improved mainly by raising the level of the overall economy. Instead, as seen in Table 2, the proportion of national GNI per person spent on local services is still very low when compared with cities in Latin and North America. In Accra, for example, the proportion is less than 0.1%, and in Dar es Salaam, 2.5%. By contrast, in the US, Canada and Brazil, the proportion ranges from 7.5% to 13.5%. These figures reinforce the impression that, in Africa, national resources – even with the advent of decentralisation – have traditionally not been spent in improving (or even maintaining) services to the fast-growing capital cities.⁴

Table 1: Municipal revenue per person, 10 African cities

| City, Country                     | Estimated population (date) | Revenue per inhabitant (US$) |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Accra, Ghana                     | 2,112,264 (2007)           | 12.53                        |
| Addis Ababa, Ethiopia            | 2,800,000 (2009)           | 91.03                        |
| Bamako, Mali                     | 1,368,000 (2006)           | 5.70                         |
| Dakar, Senegal                   | 2,271,841 (2007)           | 22.39                        |
| Dar es Salaam, Tanzania          | 2,869,477 (2008)           | 29.44                        |
| Johannesburg, South Africa      | 3,888,180 (2007)           | 701.89                       |
| Kampala, Uganda                  | 1,406,600 (2008)           | 29.20                        |
| Kigali, Rwanda                   | 779,000 (2007)             | 39.84                        |
| Maputo, Mozambique               | 1,094,315 (2009)           | 43.78                        |
| Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso        | 1,520,955 (2007)           | 22.49                        |

Sources: Ayenew, Cameron, Diop, Kironde, Nach Mback, Nansozi, Shenga, all 2010. Revenue figures in US$ are calculated for exchange rates in force at the time the fiscal information was collected.

Table 2: Municipal revenue (per person) as % of GNI/person, various cities

| City                  | (1) Municipal revenue/person (US$) | (2) National GNI/person (US$) | (1)/(2) (%) |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| Accra                 | 12.53                              | 1,330.00                      | 0.09        |
| Dar es Salaam         | 29.44                              | 1,200.00                      | 2.50        |
| Chicago               | 3,434.00                           | 45,850.00                     | 7.50        |
| Toronto               | 3,751.00                           | 35,310.00                     | 10.60       |
| Sao Paulo             | 1,266.00                           | 9,370.00                      | 13.50       |

Sources: Author’s figures on municipal revenues, based on published budgets; and UN-Habitat (2009: Table B6). Dollar equivalents calculated from currency converter site (http://www.xe.com/ucc/)

⁴ A discussion of the reasons for this striking discrepancy is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this article.
To the rescue? International assistance for African cities

In view of the severe financial challenges that African cities face, national leadership has often sought support from international agencies. During the late colonial period, aid came from agencies of the colonial powers. In the case of anglophone countries, this was limited to the Colonial Office and the Colonial (later Commonwealth) Development Corporation (CDC). The CDC, an early attempt to provide capital for investment projects throughout the British Empire (later the Commonwealth), had two contradictory aims: one was a welfare strand ‘to pre-empt social unrest’ and to support the economic underpinning of successful self-government movements; the other was to strengthen non-dollar sources of supply of food and materials in order to reinforce the viability of the British state (Cowen, 1984). By 1991, the CDC had an investment portfolio of £1,331 million. In Africa, the largest recipient in terms of projects was Kenya, while the country with the highest aggregate investment by the CDC was Zimbabwe with £62 m. in project investment ventures. It is difficult from the existing figures to parse the sectoral allocation of CDC’s worldwide investments, but 39.8% of all its placements were in Africa, and 4.3% of its worldwide placements were in the category of ‘housing finance’. Overall, then, it is very likely that little of the CDC’s large investment portfolio by 1991 – when the CDC was taking stock of its mission – was in urban areas of Africa.

Today, as the development-finance arm of the Department for International Development, the CDC has an investment portfolio of £1,933 m. and a mission to invest at least 50% in Africa, but it had no explicit urban or city-based projects in its portfolio as of 2010 (CDC, 2010). Other donors, however, have been much more active on the urban front. The most important of these, by far, has been the World Bank. According to the African Development Bank Group (n. d.: 9), the World Bank ‘is the only organisation so far that provides urban development finance on a large scale across the continent’.

5.1 The World Bank

Beginning in the early 1970s, the World Bank began to take an interest in cities around the developing world and particularly those in Africa. Since then, its projects have been much larger and more complex than urban projects supported by any of the bilateral agencies. The story of this growing and fluctuating interest has been told from different points of view by a number of writers, including those who had worked within the Bank (for example, Cohen, 2001; Farvacque-Vitkovic and Godin, 1998; Osmont, 1995; Ramsamy, 2006).

Before the Bank began to develop an investment programme for cities, housing represented the major focus of discussion with respect to the needs of urban areas in developing countries. Discussion centred on the employment benefits of good housing for ‘low-income’ groups, as well as, by the 1970s, the benefits that a good housing development programme could have for the alleviation of poverty. In the World Bank’s Sector Working Paper Urbanization, the problem was presented as a multifaceted one:

The malaise of urban centers in the developing countries is only too evident in the squalor of the rapidly growing slums and unauthorised settlements, the deterioration in many public services, the extreme shortage of housing, and the
congestion in the streets. Less immediately evident, but certainly no less important, are the growth of unemployment and the worsening of income distribution. (World Bank, 1972: 14)

During the 1970s, the ‘flagship’ urban projects in Africa, which were carried out respectively in Senegal, Zambia, Tanzania and Kenya, were the so-called ‘sites and services’ projects. In fact, half of the 58 urban projects from 1972 to 1976 were categorised as ‘Site [sic] and Services, Urban Extension Areas, etc.’ (ibid.: 59). The notion of sites and services, originally drawn from experience in Chile, involved the preparation of basic infrastructure, the training of local people to work on their own homes, and the extension of financial support to encourage them to complete their construction. Transposed to Africa, these were very large and costly projects, with up to 15,000 plots per project, often in several locations. They were officially evaluated by the Bank in a highly positive light (Keare and Parris, 1982). Ultimately, however, they fell victim to ‘slippage’ whereby original allottees sold out to wealthier purchasers, the construction of infrastructure and services was not completed, allottees kept their plots but did not build for an inordinate length of time, and numerous other problems and issues ensued. All of this was considered a ‘learning experience’ (see Cohen, 1983), but in any event the Bank’s projects were a great stimulus for the progressive development of urban-policy thought in Africa. It should not be forgotten that the urban programme in the Bank flourished under a supportive Bank President, Robert McNamara, who famously said in 1975 ‘If cities do not begin to deal more constructively with poverty, poverty may begin to deal more destructively with cities’ (McNamara, 1975: 20). McNamara’s engagement and enthusiasm helped to fuel an almost messianic drive among dedicated young Bank officials for improved urban policies.

In spite of the Bank’s dramatic efforts to deal with the housing problem in African and other developing-area cities, the problem kept getting larger. An International Housing Coalition (IHC) evaluation stresses the ultimate impossibility of coping with the housing issue:

Various donors have provided substantial funding for housing construction over the past 30 years, considerable amounts of it in Africa. The World Bank has been the major donor in the sector, providing more than US$16 billion worldwide since 1972. USAID’s Housing Guarantee (HG) loan programme, the major bilateral programme in the sector, provided US$2.7 billion in loan guarantees in 44 countries from the mid-1970s through the mid-1990s before being phased out in the late 1990s. While donor programmes and ‘pilot projects’ introduced many innovative ideas, such as sites and services, ‘evolutionary’ housing (housing built over time as financial circumstances permit), and slum upgrading, they were unsuccessful in creating sustainable systems for the production of housing at the scale needed to meet the burgeoning demand in the urban areas. UN-Habitat (2005: 7) notes that donor assistance (in Africa and Asia) ‘does not seem to have had any major impact on the incidence of slums’. (IHC, 2007: 3)

Since Bank projects – no matter how large – could not remotely keep up with the growing demands for housing and infrastructure in African cities, the policy focus began to
change. World Bank shelter-related loans to Africa fell from US$498.82 m. over 1972–81 to US$409.44 m. over 1982–91, and to US$81.26 m. in 1992–2005 (Buckley and Kalarickal, 2006: 20–1). In the 1980s one began to hear about the need to improve local management practices which could then, ideally, lead to a more effective delivery of services. Some of the next generation of projects dealt with ‘urban management,’ an elusive term since it was almost never precisely defined (see Stren, 1993). The essence of the new direction in urban projects was to take a more ‘business-like’ approach to the management of services by relating their administrative structures more closely to proper economic incentives and pricing signals. In a section on ‘The Management Problem’ a major publication stated, ‘[t]he deficiencies in urban services in the cities of developing countries are … a reflection not merely of absolute resource constraints but also of other constraints, particularly the institutional arrangements of urban service delivery’ (World Bank, 1995: 14).

The Bank accordingly supported decentralisation, but was concerned that political decentralisation, which the Bank did not directly promote, would not be matched by other reforms. ‘Whatever the motivating forces behind recent political decentralization,’ the Bank said, ‘in practice it has not necessarily brought about improvements in service delivery’ (ibid.: 17). This logic is consistent with the argument that decentralisation in Africa was largely an endogenous dynamic; in almost all cases, the Bank did not initiate decentralisation but rather worked with the decentralised structures once they were put in place (see Stren, 2003). In some cases, particularly in federal systems, a new constitution or an amendment to an existing constitution solidified the powers of each level of government, protecting the local level in significant ways. This was true, for example, in Brazil and South Africa. In other countries, such as Niger, Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Senegal, national legislation gave more powers to local-level governments.

Along with support for decentralisation, another central idea was to strengthen the economic development of cities, on the premise that cities were a major catalyst for wider development. Some of the objectives of this strategy included enhancement of urban management capacity, improvement of the regulatory framework, promotion of the private sector’s role in shelter and infrastructure provision, and strengthening financial services, such as tax collection (World Bank, 1991). Along with the remnants of structural adjustment loans, which tended to reduce public-sector employment even at the municipal level, this was the Bank’s agenda for the 1990s.

Evaluating the Bank’s urban projects at the end of the decade – largely based on data from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal – Farvacque-Vitkovic and Godin (1998) paid special attention to the financial difficulties faced by municipalities in the West African region. In this study, the authors emphasised the very low level of municipal resources. In the largest cities of this sub-region, roughly 70% of their resources came from local sources (fees and taxation), the rest from the national level (Farvacque-Vitkovic and Godin, 1998: 67). Although the overall level of municipal resources may have risen somewhat over the most recent decade, it is still so low as to raise serious questions about how municipalities can manage their local administrations and service responsibilities.

During this decade, two central themes of emerging African urban projects have been ‘good governance’ and the challenge of local participation. It is no coincidence that the
expression of these development themes coincided closely with the arrival of James Wolfensohn as President of the Bank from 1995 to 2005. At the end of his first five-year term and on the eve of his second term, Wolfensohn was outspoken about the importance of dealing with governance issues in the Bank’s projects. Speaking to the Board of Governors of the World Bank Group, he said:

…we have learned both from our general experience and from our pilot...programs that strengthening the organising, human capacity and structure of the state, both at central and local levels, is the first priority in our challenge to reduce poverty. That when we sequence the steps of [our projects] we must give the greatest emphasis first to strengthening governance and to capacity building in government and civil society.

…With poverty reduction front and center of our agenda, our work at the rockface must be governance, institutions, and capacity building. (Wolfensohn, 1999: 6)

In important respects, responding to the participation challenge will be the Bank’s – and the international assistance community’s – most important task for the immediate future. This challenge is often portrayed as balancing ‘demand-driven’ with ‘supply-driven’ components, particularly with respect to ‘good-governance’ elements. For the period between 2000 and 2007, 80 urban projects throughout the Bank were analysed for the presence of these elements. Virtually all the projects included ‘supply-side’ governance elements, such as improving the financial management of ministries or local government departments, training administrators and developing improved guidelines for infrastructure development or for local revenue collection. Yet an increasing number of urban projects over this period (60% overall) included ‘demand-driven’ components as well. Typical demand-driven elements include public access to information through regular publication or availability of documents, participation in local decision-making through regular consultations and local forums or even participatory budgeting, public oversight of government expenditure, and mechanisms for public monitoring through regular Citizen Report Cards.

As Bank Task Team Leaders (known as TT Ls) design new projects, they incorporate many of these demand-driven tools. Of course, while Bank urban projects are large and complex, with many separate components, there is an attempt to involve local governments and even neighbourhoods in project work and in the monitoring of government outcomes, where possible. One of the factors behind this trend is pressure from recipient countries. One Bank official revealed that, in a particular African country, he was asked to develop a participatory component to the Bank’s proposed urban project if he wanted the project to be accepted locally. If he was not prepared to do this, it was implied that the country would go to another donor. This highlights how local participatory mechanisms help to ‘sell’ and to ‘legitimise’ projects in the recipient country, no matter what the other technical and other benefits of the project may be.

A good example of the integration of a demand-driven tool in a larger project is the Local Government Support Project (LGSP) in Tanzania. The project, with a total funding of US$60.8 m. from 2004 to 2012, has had three interrelated components. Of the three major components, the largest in terms of cost has been support for a grants system
administered by the central government to help local governments plan capital investments. The second largest is support for administrative oversight at the President’s Office. The third and smallest element, entitled the Community Infrastructure Upgrading Programme (CIUP), for which US$18.8 m. was budgeted in the first phase, has been a very successful part of the larger project (World Bank, 2004). This element has been operating only in informal areas of Dar es Salaam, which constitute 70% of the total population.

In particular, this programme engaged local communities in 15 selected informal housing neighbourhoods in Dar es Salaam in improving their infrastructure. By involving local communities in the design and upkeep of improved infrastructure for their neighbourhoods, the project was able to charge and also receive 5% of its costs from the participants. Financial contributions from the local people, which were small in relative terms, seem to have reinforced their sense of ‘ownership’ of the improvements, which involved streetlighting (especially important to women), improved roads and footpaths in areas where seasonal flooding can prevent access to many sections, and public toilets. Visible results on the ground indicate that people are improving their houses and business premises, and new services such as clinics and shops are being built in the improved areas.

Yet, even with a series of follow-up projects by the Bank, this programme covers no more than 20% of the unplanned areas of this very large, and rapidly growing, city, or the equivalent of 14% of the overall population. There is very little chance that Tanzania’s local governments can replicate such a project on their own, and there is even less chance that a large outside donor (aside from the Bank) can add to the investment that these projects represent. Thus, although this project is a substantial achievement, and has many positive and beneficial elements, its infrastructure-improvement component – supported by local communities – can only touch a fraction of Dar es Salaam’s continually growing needs for services and infrastructure.

Although the World Bank’s urban projects are generally large and very complex – with many different components operating at different levels of government – there is increasing recognition in the Bank that it needs to take account of ‘good governance’. Its understanding of this term has evolved considerably since it originally defined governance in a purely ‘supply-driven’ fashion as ‘the use of political authority and exercise of control over a society and the management of its resources for social and economic development’ (Landell-Mills and Serageldin, 1991: 3). Almost a decade later, the Bank extended this interpretation and stressed the importance of institutional development and capacity-building, and the fact that corruption was a major issue (see World Bank, 2000). It also acknowledged the necessity to build rules and restraints into the public sector, and ‘competition’ between and within agencies. However, it went further and stressed the promotion of citizen ‘voice’, including ‘various forms of representative decisionmaking and political oversight; direct involvement by users, nongovernmental organisations and other groups of citizens in the design, implementation, and monitoring of public policies; and the transparent production and dissemination of information’ (ibid.: 23).

In a more practical vein, perhaps a key marker in the process of shifting to a demand-oriented approach is the Bank’s analysis of the requirements for effective service delivery to the poor. At the local and the urban level, Bank projects have always been measured by the effectiveness of their delivery of basic services such as water, public health services, education, electricity and sanitation. Improved delivery of these services affects poor
people in a positive way; the services themselves are a part of the Bank’s classic responsibility for the production of infrastructure. In the 2004 World Development Report: Making services work for poor people, the Bank argues that ‘services can be improved by putting poor people at the center of service provision. Doing so involves enabling the poor to monitor and discipline service providers, amplifying their voice in policymaking, and strengthening the incentives for providers to serve the poor’ (World Bank, 2003: 1).

The central argument is that services are better provided to the poor when accountability mechanisms can be built in between poor people and providers, between the poor and policy-makers, and between policy-makers and the service providers themselves. The report places special emphasis on strategies to curb corruption (an example of ‘bad governance’), since corruption affects poor people more than others (ibid.: 195). While there are many proposals to strengthen the authority structure and make delivery mechanisms more efficient (‘top-down’ or ‘supply-driven’ suggestions), there are even more ideas – many drawn from experience – about how to make the system more responsive to the users of services (‘bottom-up’ or ‘demand-driven’ suggestions).

A large project in Lagos, known as the Lagos Metropolitan Development and Governance Project, exemplifies many of these trends and suggestions. This project was approved in 2006 for US$205.69 m., but has been slow in the implementation stage, with only 26% of the total having been disbursed as of June 2010 (World Bank, 2010b). Nevertheless, an important component of this project involves community participation. The project puts US$12.13 m. into what it calls ‘urban policy and project co-ordination’. Much of this funding is dedicated to such elements as workshops and city-wide consultative forums, providing strong communications with stakeholders so as ‘to promote good urban governance, accountability and transparency practices in LASG [Lagos State Government] operations …’, conflict resolution and resettlement, strengthening Citizens’ Mediation Centres and an Office of the Public Defender for poor communities (World Bank, 2006: 49–50).

Similarly, in the Project Appraisal Document for the newly-undertaken Kenya Informal Settlements Improvement Project (KISIP), which is a project approved in March 2011 for US$165 m., the following statement appears:

*Improvement of informal settlements cannot be achieved without the active involvement of slum communities.* Many attempts to upgrade informal settlements have had limited success because of failure to fully involve community residents in the planning, implementation, monitoring, of investments. A lesson from the government-financed Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme is to fully involve all members of the community, including landlords and tenants and men and women in the selecting [of] priorities and in identifying legitimate members of the community. The proposed KISIP will not invest in any informal settlement until communities, through a participatory process, agree on a vision, prepare upgrading plans, and submit a community resolution to the municipality and the MoH. (World Bank, 2011: 18. Emphasis in the original)

Following this logic, approximately US$10 m. (or about 6% of the total) is being spent on community-related and participatory efforts in this project. The project will
operate in 15 of the country’s 45 municipalities. Supporting the Bank in various sub-components involving community participation are Agence Française de Développement and Swedish Sida. Sida has emphasised that, of all the critical factors in urban development, ‘[g]ood urban governance is probably the most important factor of all’ (Tannerfeldt and Ljung, 2006: 84). This is a broad topic, incorporating the role of the central and local governments, but also stressing the role of civil-society organisations such as non-governmental organisations. In terms of ‘slum improvement’, a promising recent approach is ‘to involve the poor and to create real ownership and substantive participation … through negotiated agreements. Local governments and slum dwellers have agreed to work together on concrete projects where both parties contribute. Here the poor put forward their views, these are taken seriously, and a deal is negotiated and agreed’ (ibid.: 88). Nevertheless, in 2007 Sida restructured and eliminated its urban group (IHC, 2008: 6).

5.2 Other agencies

Sida is just one other assistance agency with which the Bank works in its African projects. Others are the European Commission, Cities Alliance, and a number of other bilateral agencies, such as DfID, GTZ and USAID. Virtually none of these agencies mounts large projects on the same scale as the World Bank, and few of them could be considered leaders in the design and policy direction of urban project work.

In general, urban development assistance on the part of both bilateral and multilateral agencies appears to have fallen in recent years. At a meeting of the major urban donors in 2006, virtually all agency representatives claimed that urban development was declining as a proportion of their agency’s budget. Among the reasons for this are competing claims for a declining budget from more politically important issues such as climate change or food aid to war-torn or drought-ravaged areas, HIV/AIDS programmes, human-rights movements and different political-support coalitions in the country of origin (Stren, 2008). This impression has been confirmed by parallel studies in 2008 and 2010 (IHC, 2008; Kharas et al., 2010). A good example of many of these trends would be USAID, which as recently as the early 1990s had some 20 urban-oriented support staff in Washington, 12 field offices around the world (including in a number of African countries) with staff of up to 50, and a very active urban programme. Part of this operation was the Housing Guarantee loan programme, active for almost thirty years until its termination by Congress in 1993. The overseas positions, called Regional Housing and Urban Development Officer (RHUDO) positions, were eliminated in 2001. Now, the urban programme is very limited, with no overseas field offices and only a small policy and administrative staff in Washington (Interview, Jessica Tulodo, team leader for USAID’s urban programmes, January 2011).

Over the last several years, however, two important collaborative agencies have arisen in the urban field: the Urban Management Programme (UMP) and the Cities Alliance. The UMP was a co-operative effort – established in 1986 – of UNCHS (now UN-Habitat), the World Bank and the UN Development Programme. Much of the funding was supplied by UNDP. (As it was reorganising itself internally, its Director moved to Washington and established the second organisation, the Cities Alliance, in 1999.) The Urban Management Programme ceased to exist as a unified worldwide programme in 2006. In a retrospective, Cohen (2005: 5) sharply criticised the organisation. Arguing that it had little credibility in
the Bank and ‘wildly exaggerated [its] perceptions of its own self-importance’, given its very modest budget in comparison with that of the Bank for urban projects, he concluded that ‘[i]t is not evident to me … that the UMP can claim to have had a major impact on the process of urbanisation in developing countries’.

As it now operates, the Cities Alliance is a coalition of ten of the major donor countries, the World Bank and UN–Habitat (as founder members), the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Environment Programme, the European Union and, as of 2007, Brazil, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa, Chile, the Philippines, as well as Metropolis and United Cities and Local Governments. Its work represents the first time – albeit on a modest scale – that all the major urban assistance agencies have worked together on agreed projects in a wide variety of countries and regions. With an in-house staff of fewer than 20 for most of the 2000s, an annual budget of about US$14 m., and grants of up to US$500,000, the Cities Alliance has nevertheless been an important ‘player’ in the international urban arena.

With two central programmes over most of the decade – City Development Strategies and Slum Improvement plans – and a series of dynamic directors, the Alliance has fostered a relationship directly with cities and local governments that the large multilaterals are not easily able to undertake. TTLs from the Bank, for example, can directly explore projects, or find support for background research and consultancies on particular cities, using funds advanced by the Cities Alliance. This sort of funding is not normally available to Bank officials, who are (a) required to operate through central-government agencies and (b) do not have funding flexibility to explore various options in their project-design work. Until the end of fiscal year 2010, the Cities Alliance had processed a total of approximately US$141 m. of both ‘core’ and ‘non-core’ grants, over 80% of which went to support new ideas and plans for city development (Cities Alliance, n.d.: 34–5). In the second half of 2013, it was to enter a new phase of its development, as it moved from its World Bank offices in Washington to EU headquarters in Brussels.  

6 Conclusion

The beginnings of serious donor assistance to African urbanisation were in the early 1970s with the advent of the World Bank’s urban programme. From sites and services, through support for improved urban services (sometimes called the ‘urban management’ approach), to the recent emphasis on selective slum upgrading through participatory projects along with capacity-building for both national and local government institutions, the Bank has employed a wide variety of approaches to give assistance to African cities. Other agencies, such as UN-Habitat, Cities Alliance, and the bilaterals have also developed urban projects – albeit on a much smaller scale – in Africa.

While these projects and approaches have been gestating, African cities have been simultaneously affected by three major trends. The first is the overall high rate of growth that the poorest cities, in particular, have experienced. The second is political and

5. Having operated out of World Bank premises since 1999, the Cities Alliance left Washington because it would otherwise have been required to comply with new Bank requirements that, as a trust agency whose funds are administered through the Bank, its policies closely follow Bank policy. This may result in weaker Bank influence over Cities Alliance programmes, and more influence of the major European donor agencies.
administrative decentralisation which, in most cases, has not been accompanied by an equal level of fiscal decentralisation. The third is democratisation. Compared with the early 1970s, when African cities were just emerging from late colonialism, they are much larger – with generally much larger slum populations than they had earlier. Yet they have more formal powers, and their local officials and mayors are increasingly elected. While there has been a lot of experimenting with new methods of delivering essential services, such as water, sanitation, health services, education, public transport and waste disposal, these methods have been applied differentially in individual countries, with help and support both from donor agencies and from the NGO community. Local-government staff have become more professional, and both elected and appointed staff are much more in touch with developments in other parts of the urban world than they were in the past.

In the light of all these changes pulsating through African cities, has international assistance made a major difference? The answer must be both yes and no. To take the negative answer first, it is very difficult to see, on the ground, major improvements in service delivery in many countries, when slum populations are growing almost exponentially, most citizens do not have piped water available in their dwellings, and – at least in some southern African countries – the level of HIV/AIDS has approached 25% of the total adult population. On the positive side, as cities grow, countries become more productive and the proportion of the urban population living in slums and experiencing poor access to services gradually declines. In countries like Tanzania, new and continuing urban projects are having a decidedly beneficial effect in some parts of the urban informal city. In other countries, new institutional configurations for delivering water, or for removing waste, are improving the quality of life for many people. As agencies work more collaboratively through the Cities Alliance, or along with the larger projects which the World Bank is able to mount, their collective ability to connect with local people in a new demand-driven approach seems to be having a positive effect.

Given that Africa received about 31% of all committed urban assistance over the period 1995–2007, one might hope for greater impacts on the ground. But, of course, one must remember that the needs of African cities are far greater than those which the collective assistance of the international community can possibly satisfy on a continual basis. What is clear is that African cities, their local populations, and their local governments, are much more connected to a wide range of solutions to their service and administrative challenges than they were before, and as a result much more ready to engage in creative efforts to respond to their own needs. The international community has played an important role in the opening of these possibilities. Improvement will be slow, but there are visible changes.

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6. Kharas et al. (2010: 7) estimate that, during 1995-2007, Africa received the largest share (at 31%) of committed urban assistance. After Africa came South and Central Asia with 18%, East Asia and Pacific with 17%, Latin America and the Caribbean with 13%, the Middle East and North Africa with 11%, and Europe with 6%. While the authors do not offer an aggregate figure on urban assistance over this period, they estimate that urban public investment needs are ‘around US$120 billion per year’, while ODA for urban development has averaged no more than US$1 bn per year.
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