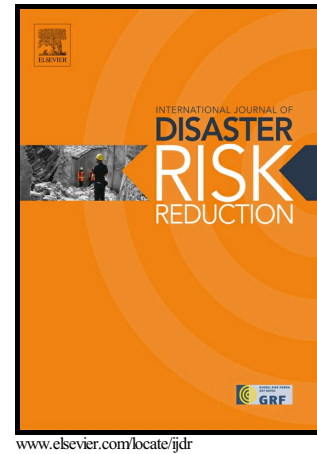


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The impact of urban development on risk in sub-Saharan Africa's cities with a focus on small and intermediate urban centres

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David Satterthwaite is a Senior Fellow at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and visiting Professor at University College, London. This article draws on two working papers for the UrbanARK project: Small and intermediate urban centres in sub-Saharan Africa and The current and potential development impact of sub-Saharan Africa's cities, funded by the ESRC-DFID grant number ES/L008777/1.

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Abstract

The main urban issue that sub-Saharan Africa is facing is rapid growth in its urban population without the urban governance structures in place that can meet their responsibilities and manage the change. This has created very large deficits in infrastructure and service provision which exposes much of the urban population to high levels of risk. Without competent, effective and accountable urban governments, it is not possible to tap the great potential that cities have for supporting good living conditions and good health. This paper examines both the scale of urban change and the development challenge facing sub-Saharan Africa's urban areas and the possible implications on risk. It describes how a substantial proportion of sub-Saharan Africa's national (and urban) population lives in small and intermediate size urban centres (and thus not in rural areas or large cities) and considers what we know about risk in these urban centres and the implications for development. The paper suggests that within the region's urban population, inadequacies in provision for basic infrastructure and services are usually larger, the smaller the urban centre. Most small urban centres in the region have local governments with very little capacity or funding to fulfil their responsibilities for risk reducing infrastructure and services. Of these, the inadequacies in provision for water and sanitation are the best documented. But in some instances, provision for water and sanitation is so poor in large cities that the proportion of their inhabitants lacking adequate provision is as high as those living in small urban centres.

Key words: urban change; urban risk; small urban centres; local government; infrastructure; services

1. Introduction

For each five year period between 1950 and 2015, sub-Saharan Africa had the fastest urban population growth rates among the world's regions – driven by high rates of natural increase and net rural to urban migration. But part of this is due to most sub-Saharan African nations having much lower starting points; sub-Saharan Africa was much the least urbanized region in 1950.¹ But Asia has had a more rapid rate of change of the percentage urban from 1990.

Sub-Saharan Africa's urban population was 294 million inhabitants in 2010 and is projected to grow to 621 million by 2030; it was just 19 million in 1950. As Table 1 indicates, in 2010 it had one mega-city (Lagos with 10.8 million inhabitants) two very large cities (Kinshasa with 9.4 million and Greater Johannesburg with 8.0 million), 15 large cities with 2-4.9 million and 123 cities with 250,000-1.99 million. 140.7 million urban dwellers in the region lived in urban centres with less than 250,000 inhabitants including a substantial proportion in urban centres of less than 20,000 inhabitants. Not surprisingly, the nations with the most large cities are generally those with the largest economies.²

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