

# STATE OF AFRICA

TRENDS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE CAUSES OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN AFRICAN METROPOLITAN CITIES

CONTENT CONCEPT AND CALL FOR AUTHORS

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According to the 2018 UN-HABITAT report entitled 'The State of African Cities', more than 400 million Africans live below the poverty line. Income inequality has escalated, youth unemployment has intensified, and gender inequality persisted on the continent.<sup>1</sup> UN-HABITAT further noted that despite a massive agricultural potential many African countries remain highly food insecure and increasingly vulnerable to global climate change fluctuations that affect farmlands. Africa has over 65% of the world's arable land and could effortlessly meet its food requirements and possibly feed the entire planet by 2050. While sustained foreign direct investment in the agricultural and extractive industries towards Africa amounted to over \$56.5 billion in 2016, Africa's solid developmental potential has not yet realised in most sectors. Africa's agricultural sector has great potential to be the messiah of African development. Unfortunately, upscaling agricultural activities in Africa countries, as majority of initiatives are focused on practice at a subsistence level. About 42% of Africa's population lives below the poverty line, indicating a need to strategically refocus the development path and ensure that Africa's rising narrative reflects in the quality of life for many on the continent.

Notwithstanding these development potentials, many people have moved from the rural to urban centres on the continent; an increasing number of people in these metropolises live below the poverty line, and inequality has become a prominent feature of Africa's urban spaces. The fundamental questions the present book attempts to answer are.

- What are the significant causes of pervasive poverty and inequality in major urban centres on the continent?
- What measures should African countries deploy to address this critical developmental challenge?

Fundamental to the book will be to investigate how the methodological framework of the various poverty alleviation projects initiated by multilateral organisations have perhaps exacerbated the poverty and inequality in Africa.

### Defining poverty

Poverty is generally viewed as a condition whereby people's basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter, are not met. Three years after the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the United Nations (UN) sees poverty through two different lenses: absolute and overall poverty. The primary objective of the Rio 'Earth Summit' was to produce a broad agenda and a new blueprint for international action on environmental and development issues that would help guide international cooperation and development policy in the twenty-first century.

However, the UN defined absolute poverty as a condition characterised by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information.

Overall poverty, on the other hand, is seen as a lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods, hunger and malnutrition, ill health, limited or lack of access to education and other essential services, increased morbidity and mortality from illness, homelessness and inadequate housing, unsafe environments and social discrimination and exclusion. While absolute poverty is seen in terms of minimum acceptable living standards within the society in which a person lives, overall poverty recognises the many factors that can contribute to deprivation. The need to eradicate poverty in all its forms has been a perennial preoccupation of the UN since 2000. Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) clearly instructs a global partnership to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. Despite this worldwide coalition against poverty, more than 637 million people live below the poverty line of \$1.25 a day. Our objective will be to investigate why poverty has persisted, especially around urban centres on the continent, and to suggest country-specific and regional pathways through which absolute and overall poverty could be progressively eradicated.

### Defining inequality

Inequality is a nuanced and complex concept. In broad terms, it could be defined as the state of not being equal in status, rights and opportunities.<sup>2</sup> However, two essential factors of inequality are discernible in popular literature: living conditions inequality and economic inequality. Concerning economic inequality, two schools of thought exist. The first focuses on the inequality of outcomes in the material dimensions of wellbeing, which may result from circumstances beyond one's control, such as ethnicity, family background, and gender. These may pre-expose someone to some level of economic power or deprivation.<sup>3</sup> The second view focuses only on the circumstances beyond a person's control that affect their potential outcomes. Of importance to our book is living conditions inequality, which is concerned with the material differences between people. Long-term transfer of wealth and educational opportunities are some of the main drivers of living conditions inequality.

Africa's metropolitan cities, such as Abidjan, Lagos, Cairo, Nairobi, Kinshasa, Dar es Salaam and Johannesburg, represent what many within the UN system have called hybrid cities. The hybridity of these cities rests upon how opulence is displayed, but they are also home to some of the poorest communities on the continent. In Abidjan, the people of Abidjan-Plateau, Cocody and Marcory exhibit high levels of wealth, while most inhabitants of Abobo, Youpobong and Adjame live far below \$1,25 per day. The same could be said of Johannesburg where the stark difference in wealth between Sandton and Alexandria Township reflects the legacy of apartheid segregation practices segregated. Note that South Africa is the most unequal country in the world, thus making our research in the Johannesburg metro a worthwhile endeavour.

<sup>1</sup>UN-HABITAT. 2018. The State of African Cities 2018: The Geography of African Investment, PFD Media Group, London, p.28.

<sup>2</sup>UN. 2015. Concepts of Inequality, in Development Issues No. 1. P.1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

Dar es Salaam also exhibits high levels of hybridity in its development approach and has been noted as one of the most unequal cities in Africa. Therefore, our choice of metropolitan cities is a calculated attempt to investigate challenges with wealth distribution in African cities and to propose policy directions that competent city authorities could take to lessen the poverty and inequality situation in these cities.

### Conceptualising poverty and inequality in Africa's urban setting

According to Alcook<sup>4</sup>, there is no agreement on a clear scientific definition of poverty because the concept is inevitably political and thus inherently contested. Therefore, as a political concept, what we mean by poverty depends on what we intend or expect to do about it. However, academics have also not agreed on what constitutes poverty and what methodological approaches should be adopted to determine who is poor. As Alcook<sup>5</sup> further contends, academic and political debate about poverty is not just descriptive but has increasingly taken a prescriptive approach. The complexity arising from academics and politicians' essentialist approach to poverty presupposes that we cannot learn about poverty by adopting a nominal approach. A series of contested definitions and complex arguments overlap and sometimes contradict each other. Beyond the ping-pong of what constitutes poverty, Sachs<sup>6</sup> pragmatically notes that poverty should be seen as a process where a section of humanity is deprived of access to the essential tools for staying alive, such as safe drinking water, basic sanitation, a bed net to fight malaria, a doctor in the case of a dreaded illness that is otherwise treatable, and seeds so that crops can be grown. Unlike Alcook, Sachs moves away from the prescriptive approach to defining poverty and adopts a more descriptive approach to understanding what signifies poverty. Sen<sup>7</sup>, conversely, looks at poverty from a philosophical perspective. He contends that in most instances, poverty is defined as counting the number of poor people in a particular society and then expressing poverty as the ratio of the poor people to the total number of people in that community. This may require specific data on the population and an acceptable definition of poverty. However, there is no workable methodology to account for the poor in a particular community. Sen<sup>8</sup> contends that if the above descriptive definition of poverty is acceptable, then the requirements of a concept of poverty must include two different but related exercises. This will consist of a method of identifying a group of people as poor and, secondly, a way of aggregating the characteristics of the set of poor people into an overall image of poverty.

That notwithstanding, the book will tilt towards the definition of poverty as reasoned by Rowntree,<sup>9</sup> who defined families as being in 'primary poverty' if their

total earnings were insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency. Rowntree assumes that physical needs far supersede an individual's or community's psychological and mental wellbeing. The prescriptive approach adopted by Rowntree to define poverty has generally been the overarching consideration of the UN since the early 1990s. The MDGs and the recently adopted SDGs recognised poverty as the number one challenge the UN system needs to overcome. Goal 1 of the MDGs and SDGs clearly instructs a global partnership to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. For the UN system, poverty is more than the lack of income and resources to ensure a sustainable livelihood. It entails limited access to education and essential services, social discrimination and exclusion, and lack of participation in decision-making.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the UN system contends that anybody who lives on less than \$1.90 a day is poor and therefore lives below the poverty line. Though descriptive in its approach, the UN definition of poverty provides a prescriptive framework through which challenges associated with poverty could be overcome. In this regard, therefore, anybody earning above \$1.90 a day is not considered poor. Considering the Rowntree and the UN approach, two distinct methodological frameworks are considered for the book project. First is the Rowntree approach, which sees poverty through a prescriptive lens. In this regard, poverty should be seen as the ratio of what someone earns versus what he needs. The UN approach, which is more descriptive in outlook, suggests that anyone making below \$1.90 per day is poor. The book project's methodological approach will consider these two critical frameworks and develop a research design that embraces the two approaches.

However, many have argued that African inequality has principally evinced various trends since most countries achieved political independence in the 1960s. According to Netshitenzhe<sup>11</sup>, rising inequality is not unique to Africa. He notes that inequality finds expression in most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, countries and even in countries such as China, where poverty has been drastically reduced. The argument put forward by many working in the field of social justice points to the fact that inequality is a complex phenomenon, which affects anyone in any region of the world. The perennial question is what inequality is and how it can be measured? According to the UN, inequality means a person or region is not equal in status, rights and opportunities vis-à-vis another person or region.<sup>12</sup> From this definition, two broad distinctions could be made between economic inequality and inequality of rights.

Economic inequality generally refers to income disparity between races, people or regions and monetary inequality, resulting in differences in living conditions.

<sup>4</sup>Alcook, P. 1997. *Understanding Poverty*. Palgrave, New York, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p.4.

<sup>6</sup>Sachs, J. 2008. The end of poverty: Economic possibilities for our time, in the *European Journal of Dental Education*, Vol 12 (1), p.18.

<sup>7</sup>Sen, A. 1997. *Poverty and Famines: An Essay in Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford University Press, London. P. 10.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>UN. 2018. *Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform our World*. Also available @ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/poverty/> accessed on 22/08/2018.

<sup>11</sup>Netshitenzhe, J. 2014. Inequality matters: South African trends and interventions, in the *New Agenda: South African Journal of Social and Economic Policy*. Vol 2014, Issue 53, p.8

<sup>12</sup>UN. 2015. *Concepts of Inequality*, in *Development Issues* No. 1. P.1.

Inequality of rights is when people are not equal before the law or have unequal access to political power.

The book will focus on economic inequality, narrowing our lens on why some individuals do not possess the same material wealth as others. Emphasis will be on the standard of living, inequalities in income, access to quality education, health and nutrition. The book will adopt the global Gini index to measure inequality in the selected metropolitan areas. The Gini index measures the extent to which income distribution between society and the economy deviates from an equal distribution of resources. Its measurement ranges between 0 and 1, with 0 representing a completely equal society and 1 representing an utterly unequal society. Income and wealth are the two critical variables in measuring inequality. Wages, rental, interest and monthly profits fall within the income category, while wealth inequality is measured through household assets from savings. Many have argued that although moderate levels of inequality might be tolerable to incentivise people to work harder, high levels of inequality suppress the impact of economic growth.

Nonetheless, the book will contribute to differentiating between the standard of living and wellbeing. Our book will emphasise that the concept of inequality should not be confined to what people want but also include what people need to live a dignified life. The methodological design of the book will ensure that inequality is not only viewed from an outcome-orientated approach but also from an opportunity-orientated perspective, which acknowledges that circumstances of birth are essential to life outcomes and that the equality of opportunity requires a fair starting point for all in society.

### Poverty and inequality in Africa's urban centres

Poverty and inequality have remained a preoccupation of international development agencies for decades. It has received particular attention in Africa due to the vestiges of slavery, colonialism and diseases. According to Liddle,<sup>1</sup> almost half of the urban populations in Africa live in settlements defined as slums. The World Bank defines a slum as a house that lacks access to improved water and sanitation, a sufficient living area and durability. A fifth of the urban population live below their national poverty lines.<sup>2</sup> The fundamental question various scholars are concerned with is why stark poverty and glaring inequalities in urban centres across the continent are so prominent. Poverty and inequality around urban centres on the continent have been ascribed to various theoretical predilections such as history, endowments, institutions, trade and increasing returns to scale.<sup>3</sup> While the benefits associated economies of scale have been the main driver of the large concentration of people in urban areas, history is noted to have played a far more significant role in facilitating the concentration of people around urban centres on the continent. History records suggest that people were moved to urban areas to work in the colonial administration and in most industries associated with colonial implantation on the continent.

However, the concentration of people around the centres where colonial offices were established does not necessarily lead to a better standard of life. Many of those who moved to the urban centres were left destitute and struggled to find jobs. More than half a century after the end of colonialism, the unemployment and poverty gap in many African metropolitan cities persists. The questions the book intends to answer are:

- Why have African governments failed to reduce poverty among most people living in urban centres?
- Why has inequality continued to persist despite measures by government and multilateral organisations to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor?
- What should governments do to ensure that most people live above the poverty line and that the inequality gap between the rich and poor is bridged?

Using the multidimensional approach, the book will employ several socio-economic indicators to compile asset indices to determine the poverty level in each metropolitan city. With the money metric approach, four important variables will form the backbone through which the indices will be analysed. First will be liquid household assets, housing, the head of the household's educational background and other characteristics such as household size, whether the household is headed by a male and the number of children under five years old. The research methodology for this book will consider these variables.

### Scope of the book

The intellectual capital and scope of the book will be based on the definition of poverty by Rowntree, where he defined families as being in 'primary poverty' if their total earnings are insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency. In this regard, the book will employ the income-metric framework to measure a metropolitan area's poverty level or lack thereof. While the income metric focuses more on the households' income and expenditure data to assess the level of poverty the household is experiencing. Our book will attempt to emphasise the multidimensional approach adapted from Booysen et al. (2008:1113)<sup>4</sup>, employing several socio-economic indicators to compile asset indices to determine the poverty level in a given metropolitan city. With the money metric approach, four important variables will form the backbone through which the indices will be analysed.

The multidimensional approach employs both income-metric frameworks, which details whether the total income of the head of house measured against members of the household equals or less than \$1.90 per person per day and will also include assessing the type of sanitation used by the inhabitants and whether the

<sup>1</sup> Liddle, B. 2017. Urbanisation and Inequality/poverty, in the journal of Urban Science, Vol. 1 (35), p.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>David, A., et al. 2018. Spatial poverty and inequality in South Africa: A municipality level analysis, In Kobe University Discussion Paper No. DP2018-02, p.3.

<sup>4</sup>Booyesen, F. 2008. Using an Asset Index to Assess Trends in Poverty in Seven Sub-Saharan African Countries, in World Development, Vol 36 (6), p.1113

household has a radio, TV, fridge, tiled floor and bicycle. Using quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches, the book will construct an asset index of the metropolitan area.

The quantitative research approach will aim to reveal and analyse the income level of people and unravel some essential variables that show whether a person is poor or not.

**Chapters are welcome from prospective contributors in the following thematic thrusts.**

- Theories and concepts of urban poverty and inequality in Africa
- Historical antecedents and trends of urban poverty and inequality
- Relationship between poverty and inequality in urban centres
- Trends and future direction of urban landscape in Africa
- Rural to urban migration patterns; causal approaches
- Measures of poverty and or inequality in Africa
- Analytical approaches to injustice in the acquiring and distribution of urban resources
- Unemployment as a determining factor in urban inequality.

Prospective chapter contributors are urged to specify for which sub-theme they would like their abstract proposal to be considered. Abstracts should not be longer than 500 words and should include the full details (name/s, title, institutional affiliation, position, e-mail, and telephone number) of the contributor.

**Abstracts based on empirical research findings should contain the following concise statements:**

**Background:**

The description of the problem/hypothesis/objectives

**Methods:**

Study methods used, or approaches taken

**Results:**

Specific results in summarised form

**Conclusions:**

Statement about the main outcomes

**Abstracts for reporting on strategies/projects should contain the following concise statements:**

**Background:**

Short statement summarising the issue(s) addressed by the abstract

**Methods:**

A brief description of the project, experience, programme, or research

**Results:**

A brief description of the results or lessons learned

**Conclusions:**

A brief statement of next steps/recommendations

**Abstracts on scholarly reflections and/or policy engagements and concepts should contain concise statements of:**

**Issues:**

A summary of the issue(s) addressed by the abstract

**Description:**

A description of the actors, options, experiences and/or advocacy

**Lessons:**

Outcomes and implications

**Call to action:**

Possible next steps or recommendations

Abstracts will be assessed against the criteria of originality, quality, relevance and potential impact.

The deadline for the submission of chapter abstracts is **30 September 2023**. Authors of selected abstracts will be notified by **15 October 2023**. The deadline for submission of final papers is **10 December 2023**.

For submission of abstract, use the link: <https://hsrc.ac.za/state-of-africa-2024.php>, and for queries send email to [publish@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:publish@hsrc.ac.za). Abstracts should be submitted in Microsoft Word.

