
Article:
Enns, C. orcid.org/0000-0002-6796-7465 (2018) Mobilizing research on Africa's development corridors. Geoforum, 88. pp. 105-108. ISSN 0016-7185

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.11.017

Mobilizing research on Africa's development corridors

1. Introduction

Globally, there has been an unprecedented expansion of transport infrastructure in recent years. In Africa, much of this transport infrastructure is being built as part of development corridors. Development corridors are networks of roads, railways, pipelines and ports, often accompanied by other types of infrastructure and regulatory reforms, built to enable the movement of commodities between sites of production and economic hubs. By some estimates, there are over 30 development corridors taking shape across Africa; if completed, these corridors will span over 53,000 km in length, crisscrossing Africa and opening vast areas of land for investment in the process (Laurance et al. 2014; Laurance et al. 2015).

The planning and implementation of new development corridors has been driven by an ongoing rush to invest in Africa's natural resources, as investors need transport infrastructure to move commodities between sites of production, processing zones and global markets. Alongside investor enthusiasm, the global development community has also demonstrated a strong level of support for new corridors. This support is premised on the idea that new investments in development corridors can be leveraged to support broader development objectives. As Mulenga (2013) writes, development corridors are understood "not only as a means of transporting goods and services or as a gateway for land-locked countries, but also as a tool for stimulating social and economic development" (2013: 2). In short, the global development community has attached a 'win-win' narrative to Africa's corridor agenda, framing development corridors as an effective

way of creating conditions that are attractive to investors, while simultaneously driving local, domestic and regional development.

Yet, recent geographic research on Africa's corridor agenda reveals tensions and inconsistencies in this win-win narrative, drawing attention to the unexpected, diverse and sometimes adverse impacts of corridor development on different segments of the population (for example, see: Enns (2017), Kirshner and Power (2015), Mosley and Watson (2016), Sulle (2017) and Sipangule (2017)). This research might be succinctly described as showing how the spatial reorganization of land that accompanies corridor development enables certain flows of capital, commodities and people to move easier across space, while introducing new forms of spatial exclusion and immobility for others. I argue that employing the new mobilities paradigm – which emphasizes the interdependent relationship between mobilities and immobilities – helps to make sense of what and who moves through corridors and what and who does not, as well as who benefits and who loses as a result of these mega-developments. In addition to enabling researchers to theorize about uneven and conflicting mobilities along new corridor routes, the new mobilities paradigm also serves as a lens to examine how trajectories of power are enacted through corridor development. Ultimately, applying the new mobilities paradigm to the study of development corridors presents an opportunity to nuance the 'win-win' narrative attached to Africa's corridor agenda and to draw attention to new patterns of spatial exclusion and immobility that must be addressed if new corridors are to contribute to inclusive development.

To begin, this article briefly defines what development corridors are and then distills existing literature describing the development benefits of corridor construction. Next, the article illustrates how employing the new mobilities paradigm in future research might open additional avenues for understanding both how and why the spatial reorganization of land that accompanies

corridor development introduces new patterns of spatial inclusion and exclusion. Then, in the final sections of this paper, I outline three specific directions for future research employing this approach, which includes research that pays attention to: (1) what and who moves *through* corridors and what and who does not; (2) what and who is moved or displaced *by* corridors; and, (3) new forms of movement and mobilization that emerge *in response to* corridor construction.

2. Africa's development corridors

A corridor connects landlocked production areas to urban or coastal processing zones and international markets (Hope and Cox 2015; Smalley 2014). Development corridors include both "hard" and "soft" infrastructure (Kunaka and Carruthers 2014). Hard infrastructure generally refers to transport infrastructure, such as roads, railways, pipelines and ports, as well as accompanying logistical infrastructure, such as transport services, storage facilities and processing plants. Soft infrastructure refers to regulatory reforms, such as one-stop borders, the creation of new implementation and monitoring agencies and investment promotion initiatives. In this sense, "a corridor is more than simply the transport route; the term signals either the concentrated presence of economic activity that is related to the route, or an explicit policy initiative that takes advantage of the transport infrastructure" (Smalley 2014).

Much of the mainstream development discourse on Africa's corridor agenda has been informed by development economists, transport and logistics specialists and conservation scientists [for example, see: Calderón and Servén (2008), Edwards et al. (2014), Kunaka and Carruthers (2014), and Laurance et al. (2014; 2015)]. Within this literature, Africa's corridor agenda promises to serve the interests of investors, governments and everyday people alike. The premise underlying of this perspective is that constructing integrated networks of roads, railways,

pipelines and ports attracts investors and drives industrial development in 'underdeveloped' rural spaces that 'lack' market linkages. This, in turn, drives the growth of secondary and supporting industries in the same spaces, which are key to development. Furthermore, well-planned corridors are also promised to deliver broader development benefits, including improved transportation and market and economic opportunities for rural people and better service delivery in rural spaces. Given the wide array of benefits that these projects are promised to deliver, development corridors have recently been described as "the key to unlocking Africa's potential" (Aurecon 2017), and as foundational to "achieving inclusive growth" (World Economic Forum 2017).

Yet, the hype surrounding development corridors has, at times, turned a blind eye to the diverse, unexpected and sometimes adverse impacts that corridor development has on different segments of the population. There is an overwhelming assumption within this literature that the development benefits of new corridors naturally drive inclusive development – which may or may not be the case. There is a need for more research that acknowledges the real impacts of Africa's corridor agenda for everyday people, including the fact that this approach to development creates new patterns of spatial inclusion and exclusion simultaneously. Although there are many possible entry points for such research, in the sections that follow I show why the new mobilities paradigm may be a particularly productive lens to adopt in future research.

3. Mobilizing research on Africa's development corridors

During the early 2000s, the new mobilities paradigm emerged as researchers began to pay greater attention to "...mobility in the forms of movement of people (human mobility), social networks and relations (social mobility), trade and capital (economic mobility), and information and images (symbolic mobility)" (Ilcan 2013: 3). Although it may seem surprising – given that corridors are

all about facilitating movement – analyses of corridors in Africa that apply such a critical perspective remain relatively few.[1] By examining how emergent and familiar forms of mobility and immobility are prompted, produced and interrupted by development corridors, research applying a critical mobility perspective stands to generate important empirical and theoretical insights about peoples' everyday lived experiences with corridors, as well as how trajectories of power are enacted through corridor development. The remainder of this article outlines three specific research directions that might be pursed towards this end.

3.1 Moving through development corridors

Africa's new development corridors are being built to enhance flows of commodities between landlocked production areas and urban or coastal processing zones. In addition to serving the interests of investors by moving commodities more efficiently to global markets, corridors are also promised to benefit local populations by creating new market linkages between rural and urban spaces. For example, the Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET) is anchored by a pipeline to move oil from northern Kenya to the coast. Yet, the corridor is also promised to benefit pastoralists in the region by serving as a cross-country livestock marketing route – and smallholder farmers through the creation of a new agricultural growth zone. Similarly, the core concept of the Nacala corridor in Mozambique is to rehabilitate the rail line that travels between northern Mozambique and the port of Nacala to create a new route for the transport of coal. Yet improved road infrastructure is also promised to provide improved trade routes for smallholder farmers. The corridor agenda has been constructed on the imaginary of a seamless and

[1] There is, however, a body of literature that uses the new mobilities paradigm to study roads in Africa, for example see Nielsen (2012) and Klaeger (2012; 2013).

frictionless Africa, as new corridors are promised to enable flows of capital, commodities and people to circulate seamlessly across space and between scales.

However, it is clear that there is often a significant gap between imagination and reality, as far as Africa's corridor agenda is concerned. Although corridors might enable *certain* commodities, capital and people to circulate with new ease; not all forms of capital, commodities and people move through corridors with the same ease. For instance, the construction of the Walvis Bay Corridor involves improving road connectivity between the Copperbelt of Zambia and Namibia's sea port. Container trucks carrying frozen fish now speed along the new highways connecting Namibia and Zambia to distribute fish, flooding supermarkets in landlocked Zambia with seafood. On route, the same trucks barrel by rural fisherfolk who remain largely excluded from the growing, cross-border value chains that have been created by corridor construction and now facing great competition in local markets. Thus, although new corridors contribute to connecting sites of production, consumption and trade, not all people move seamlessly through new transport infrastructure.

The new mobilities paradigm offers concepts to challenge imagined tropes about development corridors and to theorize about why some things move through corridors easier than others. Critical mobilities scholars have written at length about the relationship between uneven mobilities, power and inequality, suggesting that "mobility is a resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship" (Skeggs 2004: 49). New corridors serve as a case in point: Although promised to enable capital, commodities and people to move seamlessly across space and scales; a close examination of any corridor is likely to reveal that the experience of moving through corridors varies radically depending on who a person is and where that person is situated – an unevenness that Massey (1999) describes using the idea of "power geometries". Hence, a useful

direction for future research on development corridors is to analyse which forms of capital, commodities and people move with ease through new transport infrastructure and which experience greater friction, as well as why some flows are facilitated while others are obstructed.

The new mobilities paradigm might also enable researchers to gain an appreciation for the points, nodes or moorings within development corridors where movement is slowed, paused or stopped (Hannam et al. 2006). Recent research by Honke and Cuesta-Fernandez (2017) illustrates how ports attached to development corridors under-construction in Tanzania contribute to both flow and fixity. The same argument can be made about other types of infrastructure and regulatory reforms that tend to accompany corridor development, such as the construction of new border posts or the implementation of weigh scales and safety checks for trucks. Each technology serves to foster the mobility of some commodities, capital and people, while stalling or prohibiting the mobility of others. A critical mobilities lens helps to overcome the temptation of thinking that a more mobile world inherently replaces a world of fixities; instead, leading the researcher to focus on the politics of who and what move through corridors and to ask what powers allow or disallow this movement (Cresswell 2010).

3.2 Moved by development corridors

Both the construction of transport infrastructure and its accompanying logistical infrastructure tend to be land-intensive. Accordingly, constructing new corridors requires the acquisition of large amounts of land. In addition to the land needed for infrastructure, many corridors are overlaid by development enclaves and economic zones that necessitate additional investment in land for processing zones, growth zones, industrial/agricultural zones and special economic zones. For example, the LAPSSET corridor in Kenya includes a 500-meter-wide corridor for transport

infrastructure overlaid by a 50-kilometer-wide economic corridor on either side of the development corridor for industrial and agricultural activities (LCDA 2016), while the Government of Mozambique plans to build two large Special Economic Zones (SEZs), as well as tourist projects, to service the Nacala Corridor.

Development corridor proponents sometimes argue that large-scale land acquisitions required for the construction of new corridors have minimal impacts in terms of displacement, as corridor routes tend to be sparsely populated. Furthermore, it is suggested that the anticipated development benefits of new transport infrastructure outweigh any adverse impacts caused by land acquisition. Yet, some recent research challenges such claims by drawing attention to incidences of large-scale displacement because of corridor construction. For example, in an article recently published in this journal, Kirshner and Power (2015) argue that the construction of the Nacala corridor in Mozambique has been paralleled by considerable displacement of local communities. According to Sulle (2017) and Sipangule (2017), smallholders are also reporting threats of displacement along the SAGCOT corridor in southern Tanzania.

Yet, this research is only just beginning to capture the extent to which Africa's corridor agenda is moving people: both literally, by driving displacement, and figuratively, by displacing people's movements, causing them to move in different directions than they might otherwise. While the research referenced above illustrates how people are displaced by corridor construction, other types of displacement also follow. To create space for the construction of new networks of roads, railways, pipelines and ports, people are moved. Then, in many cases, this initial round of displacement is followed by much broader processes of land use changes and urbanization along corridor routes (for example, see: Elliott 2016; Kirshner and Power 2015; Zoomers et al. 2017). Land may undergo formalization; investors may engage in land and real estate speculation; and

entrepreneurs may attempt to capitalize on new demand for accommodation, catering, transport and other services. As the land alongside new corridor routes becomes more valuable, those who are unequipped to participate in the new corridor economy may be displaced once again, pushed to areas where land is less desirable. This second round of displacement warrants further attention.

In addition to various rounds of physical displacement, the construction of new corridors can displace existing patterns of mobility. In some cases, this is an intentional outcome of corridor development. For example, Africa's corridor agenda is often promoted for its potential to help governments disrupt illicit flows and terrorist networks. However, in other instances, new corridors displace existing patterns of mobility inadvertently. During focus group discussions that I carried out with communities along the LAPSSET corridor in July 2017, people reported that hundreds of livestock had been fatally injured since the recent completion of the new LAPSSET highway between Isiolo and Moyale, when pastoralists try to move their livestock across the highway towards water points. In many communities, container trucks and SUVs have also hit and killed children and the elderly, who are unused to the speed that vehicles now travel at down the new tarmac highway. These stories exemplify the violent collisions that occur when existing patterns of mobility, which are often shaped by non-commercial livelihoods, come into contact with new types of mobility that are enabled and privileged in the corridor economy.

Thinking about the multiple ways in which people are moved *by* corridors – rather than solely focusing on what and whom moves *through* corridors – is a productive avenue for future research. Because corridors introduce new mobilities to facilitate new or different forms of trade, examining changing patterns of mobility along corridor routes might generate useful insights about the broader political economy of development corridors. Furthermore, if societies are increasingly governed through mobility, as Bærenholdt (2012) argues, then the introduction of new mobilities

and the disruption of existing mobilities through corridor construction can be understood as an exercise of power over territory and population. Accordingly, the new mobilities paradigm offers useful concepts to analyze the trajectories of power enacted through corridor development.

3.3 Moving in response to development corridors

The construction of new development corridors also incites new forms of mobility adjacent to corridor routes, such as the creation of feeder roads off main corridors that enable people to engage in both legal and illegal activities, such as small-scale mining, charcoal collection and hunting. People also move from the 'interior' towards newly constructed corridor routes and emergent transport hubs. As corridor construction triggers urbanization, industrial development and new economic opportunities, individuals from remote communities often respond by voluntarily moving towards corridor routes, seeking to reap the benefits of multi-local livelihoods and expanded social networks. In other instances, migration towards corridors might be understood as 'forced': As economic opportunities and social services become increasingly concentrated along corridor routes, more vulnerable populations might have little choice but to leave their homes and settle in emergent peri-urban spaces along corridor routes – regardless of whether these spaces are prepared to absorb new migrants.

However, "it is not only those who migrate, but also those who do not who are affected by migration" (Thieme 2008: 66). Those that migrate towards corridors might leave family members or dependents behind and this separation might have adverse social, psychological and security impacts. Those left behind are also forced to adjust to changing patterns of mobility. In many of the rural spaces that Africa's new corridors pass through, people practice mobile and circulatory livelihoods, including both daily movements and transhumance. Yet, new development corridors

act as magnets that pull things towards them, causing flows to move in different directions and at different speeds than in the past. For example, traders that might have regularly travelled through certain communities on foot might end up bypassing those same communities when using new corridor routes to ease their transportation costs and time. To-date, little attention has been paid to the consequences of corridor-related migration among sending and receiving communities. Approaching the study of corridors with a focus on mobility might help researchers illuminate these consequences, as well as to capture how the forms of mobility that take place adjacent to transport routes are interrupted, prompted and produced by the construction of new corridors.

Finally, another type of movement that takes place in response to new development corridors that warrants further attention is social and political mobilization. As new transport infrastructure is constructed, elected officials and political parties can reach segments of the population that were historically neglected, enabling new forms of political and social participation. Furthermore, because the construction of corridors is an exercise of power over territory and population, it is political in and of itself. Some recent work has attempted to understand why people mobilize in response to proposed development corridors – particularly when corridors risk impeding their mobility (Enns 2017). However, more work needs to be done to better understand the diverse strategies people use to resist and overturn changing patterns of mobility along corridor routes. Concepts from the mobilities literature, such as 'counter-mobilities' and 'subversive mobilities' (Sheller 2016, Cohen et al 2017), might prove useful in carrying out this research agenda.

5. Conclusions

This article illustrates how the new mobilities paradigm might help researchers to capture new patterns of spatial inclusion and exclusion and mobility and immobility along new corridor routes in Africa; presenting evidence to nuance the 'win-win' narrative that is currently attached to Africa's corridor agenda. In addition to contributing to empirical discussions about corridor development and theoretical debates about uneven and conflicting mobilities within in mobility studies, this approach to research also stands to make contributions to literature concerning the spatial turn in African studies [see also Engel and Nugent (2010)]. Finally, by mobilizing research on development corridors, researchers can also generate empirical data to help policymakers better anticipate, plan for and accommodate shifting mobilities along corridor routes. This has the potential to serve as a step towards redressing emergent forms of spatial exclusion and immobility created by corridor construction.

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