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## Heading towards 2030: outlook and challenges for essential services in Africa

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# 1. HEADING TOWARDS 2030: OUTLOOK AND CHALLENGES FOR ESSENTIAL SERVICES IN AFRICA



***The demographic revolution sweeping modern Africa is primarily urban. Everybody knows that population numbers are rising and with Africa already home to close to 15% of the world's population, compared to 7% in 1960, it also has the fastest rate of population growth of any region of the world.<sup>1</sup> Africa's population is also the world's youngest: 60% of Africans are aged under 25, compared to 44% in emerging economies, and 80% of its people earn under \$5 a day.***

This combination of phenomena – a very large and young growing population with very low incomes – has major impacts on the urbanization of Africa. The continent perfectly illustrates the ideas of American academic Edward Glaeser, who stresses the extent to which cities attract the poorest because, above all, they represent “the promise of a better life and economic and social opportunities”.

This can lead to a tendency to mistake cause for effect when worrying about the excessive numbers of poor people in a city.

Africa's cities are facing a population explosion that their very limited resources make almost impossible to control.<sup>2</sup> It is salutary to recall that the population of Lagos grew one hundredfold in less than two generations. Africapolis, the database presented in this issue by Philipp Heinrigs, uses a unique methodology to identify Africa's urban geography, based on a common definition of what qualifies as urban.

One consequence is the spread of informal settlements and services: over half the population of sub-Saharan Africa live in informal settlements, compared to 12% in North Africa.<sup>3</sup> Aside from the financial constraints, there are many technical, economic and legal barriers hampering the development of basic infrastructure, including the absence of formalized land ownership systems. Just 17% of people in Africa have access to basic sanitation and only 37% have access to sufficient water of acceptable quality at home.<sup>4</sup> Tatiana Thieme describes the “paradox of modernity” in which more people today have access to a mobile phone than access to a safe toilet option.

Managing waste is another sizeable challenge, as outlined by Martin Oteng-Ababio, with overall collection rates below 45% in sub-Saharan Africa, compared to 92% in North Africa.<sup>5</sup> Where they have access to services, the poorest suffer from “poverty penalties”, often paying higher prices than the better-off – who can access public services and network connections – for services of lower quality.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, Africa presents a very wide diversity of situations that have to be taken account of, and the governance of services varies from country to country. Houria Tazi Sadeq outlines the proactive attitude that authorities in Morocco take to water governance. The fact remains that in the absence of adequate publicly organized solutions, the informal sector organizes responses for meeting its basic needs that are “creative and spontaneous.”<sup>7</sup> Informal and self-organized solutions spring up to improve people's access to essential services, creating unique innovative ecosystems and a vision of the smart city designed for and by Africans, as in the African Smart City described by Sénamé Koffi Agbodjinou.

There remain many obstacles to improving access to services and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. The coronavirus pandemic we are experiencing has shattered fragile existing balances and, as stressed by Fadel Ndaw and Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, is making technical innovations and new economic and institutional models more important than ever if access to essential services in Africa is to improve.

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1 It is thought that between 2015 and 2050, half of all worldwide population growth will center on just eight countries, five of them in Africa (United Nations, *World Population Prospects*, 2016). These eight countries are India, Nigeria, Pakistan, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Indonesia and Uganda

2 Capital cities in Africa, with populations in the millions, often have budgets roughly equivalent to a small town in a developed economy with a population of barely 10,000

3 UN Habitat, *World Cities Report*, 2016

4 AFD, *Atlas de Africa*, 2020

5 World Bank, 2018

6 For more on this, refer to the works of C.K. Prahalad

7 Hernando de Soto, *The Mystery of Capital*, 2000