

Rachel Rose Jackson - Contagion: The Epidemic Of Slum Growth In African Cities And The Implications Thereof For Sustainable Urban Development

consultancyafrica.com August, 2, 2013. The world has undergone a demographic metamorphosis that has never before occurred in the history of mankind. Whereas before the 21st century the majority of people lived in rural settings, now more than half the world's population lives in cities. In addition, the number of cities in the world has more than quadrupled since 1950. This trend is particularly relevant for Africa, a continent that is experiencing an annual urbanisation rate of 5% - urbanising faster than any other continent. Although urbanisation does present various opportunities, cities in Africa must develop sustainably in a manner that can maintain and support urban health and environmental wellbeing, or they stand to crumble.

Of particular concern is the overwhelming establishment and growth of urban slums throughout African cities. Today, nearly three quarters of Sub-Saharan African city dwellers call the slums home. It is partly due to this rapid continent-wide expansion of urban slums that Africa stands to be the only continent where poverty continues to worsen over the next decades if sustainable growth is not promoted. The '*slum sickness*' is spreading across African cities with a contagious fervour. Without understanding its causes and exacerbating factors, this contagion is likely to spread at an unparalleled pace. Therefore, it is critical that policymakers at the community, city, national, and international level understand the unique characteristics of this demographic shift and the implications it has for urban policy design.

This CAI discussion paper summarises the characteristics and causes of the unprecedented growth and expansion of urban slums within the urban centres of Africa. After reviewing these trends, the paper discusses what implications these findings have with regard to sustainable urban design and policy of the African

city.

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