

On the Move

Migration Challenges in the Indian Ocean Littoral

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Editors

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Migration to the City: Governance Challenges and Opportunities

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According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), by 2030, 5 billion people will live in cities and the global slum population will number 1.4 billion. In addition to the challenges of providing clean water, functioning sanitation systems, and adequate infrastructure, cities host a burgeoning population of economic migrants, refugees, and other temporary and informal residents. As a result of rural-to-urban migration and natural growth, UNFPA projects that the population of megacities such as Cairo will grow at the rate of 2.5 percent, while medium-sized and smaller urban areas such as Nairobi will grow at rates up to 4.5 percent.

Many cities are unsustainable in terms of their land use and their impact on the environment. As expert Jeb Brugmann notes, in addition to being centers of political and social pressures, urban areas also struggle with expanding networks of transnational crime, outbreaks of disease, supply chain breakdowns, transportation and housing inadequacies, and widespread poverty. For the most part, government policies have not kept pace with these developments. As this unregulated growth continues, the world's urban centers could turn into crisis zones.

Cairo: “A mosaic of subcities.” The ever-expanding megacity of Cairo serves as a microcosm for these stresses, and its slums and informal settlements present a useful study of how migration and urbanization intersect with governance and security. Of the greater Cairo region's 20 million residents, some 15 to 17 million live in slums or informal settlements, and an estimated 70 to 80 percent of new migrants settle into these areas. For example, the city's central cemetery, known as the “City of the Dead,” houses an estimated 1 to 4 million residents. Although these slum areas may be able to tap into the city's electricity and water systems, it is the government's treatment of these areas that will determine if they flourish as threats or assets.

- **Imbaba: Unrest within Cairo?** Imbaba, once a village on the periphery of Cairo in the 1960s, received a massive influx of migrants who were attracted by Cairo's economic development. As migration increased, Imbaba became a crowded and poor informal urban slum. In the 1980s, in response to the lack of government presence, religious figures became active in and took over parts of Imbaba. Despite this activity—and the potential political threats it posed—Imbaba operated relatively autonomously until the early 1990s. Finally, in 1992, the government conducted raids and attempted to disperse subversive elements. It took the government another two years to begin providing public services, including roads, electricity, and water. However, demand and expectations outstripped supply, corruption flourished, and the government eventually returned to its long-term pattern of indifference. Today, Imbaba remains a center of unrest.
- **Garbage City: Land of Opportunity.** Manshiyet Nasser is an informal settlement that is home to the marginalized yet self-sufficient community of *zabaleen*, or garbage collectors. Decades ago, Copts began to make a living by collecting and separating Cairo's waste into perishable and recyclable products, in turn keeping the streets relatively clean and serving as the city's primary garbage collection service. Recently, the government hired a private corporation to collect the city's garbage and replace the *zabaleen* system. In reality, this company

relies on the existing mechanisms and works closely with the zabaleen for waste collection. But, as a part of the government's 2009 response to the H1N1 (swine flu) epidemic, the pigs used to dispose of perishable waste—and whose meat was also sold for profit—were confiscated and slaughtered with relatively little government compensation. Rather than improving the existing zabaleen system, the government's failure to capitalize on this informal commerce has led to a major waste buildup problem in Cairo and the loss of a major livelihood opportunity for one of the city's most self-sufficient minority communities. In this case, active marginalization of a successful informal economic and social system has ended in perpetually growing piles of rubbish.

Nairobi: Growth and Unrest. East Africa, the least urbanized region of the continent, now has the fastest growing urban population. Kenya's cities are growing particularly rapidly as waves of rural migrants arrive in search of economic opportunity. Violent crises in neighboring states—especially Somalia—have also sent refugees pouring into the city. The result of this movement is rapidly growing slums that house millions and serve as microcosms for the country's ethnic, economic, and political tensions. Given current concerns about extremists arriving from Somalia, maintaining Kenya's stability is an issue of international import.

Somalis in Nairobi are a self-sufficient community that may pose a future security threat. Although legally confined to refugee camps in the remote border areas—such as Dadaab in the north-east—many of these refugees move into Nairobi in search of better employment opportunities and improved living conditions. Somalis in particular have come to dominate the area of Nairobi's Eastleigh neighborhood and have formed thriving networks of trade, remittances, and communication. This community may be a lifeline to desperate families in a war-torn nation, but can also function as a means of financing destabilizing elements in Somalia.

- **Mathare: Constant Tensions.** After Kenya erupted in violence following the 2007 elections, Mathare, already considered the most violent slum in Africa by the United Nations Development Programme, suffered urban turmoil that displaced, injured, or killed over 1,500 people. Mathare, which experiences ongoing ethnic tension, houses over 800,000 Nairobi residents. The slum quickly ignited when the violence began, and police and rescue forces found it extremely difficult to access the dense settlement. There are also allegations that the government capitalized on this unrest and supported continued violence for political gain. Given the tension surrounding the upcoming 2012 elections, Mathare exemplifies the threat of an “urban tinderbox” for violent conflict, impenetrable and outside state control.
- **Kibera: An Upgrade?** Kibera, Nairobi's largest slum, houses over 1 million people, and was originally established as a military camp for Sudanese soldiers serving with the British during the colonial era. The area has since become a permanent settlement and has grown exponentially in recent decades. Partially in response to internal political pressures and international media attention, the government has allowed the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) to enter and begin a local upgrading program. Kibera presents an opportunity for an internationally supported infrastructure project to gain local support. So far, however, the UN plan has disrupted the informal land rental system and deprived local landlords of their livelihoods. The process has also displaced those in the upgrade zone for

an indefinite time period, angering landlords and former tenants alike. In addition, residents fear that the newly upgraded buildings will quickly become prohibitively expensive, thereby driving the tenants to informal housing a second time. Once again, a lack of integrated urban management is exacerbating tensions in one of Africa's largest slums.

Nairobi and Cairo are national capitals of two major US allies, and the future of each city has far-reaching humanitarian and security implications. Their urban challenges must be addressed within a comprehensive framework that includes migration policy, economic development, foreign investment strategies, environmental preservation, and infrastructure development. Solutions must have local buy-in and should learn from how informal urban communities in each city have either succeeded or failed to provide their residents with basic services. Governments and international bodies must approach policy from several angles in these communities, effectively responding to short-, medium-, and long-term crises and opportunities for political and economic reform. Given these factors, facing the challenges of urban growth will be a key component of improving global security.

Sources: UNFPA, UN-HABITAT.