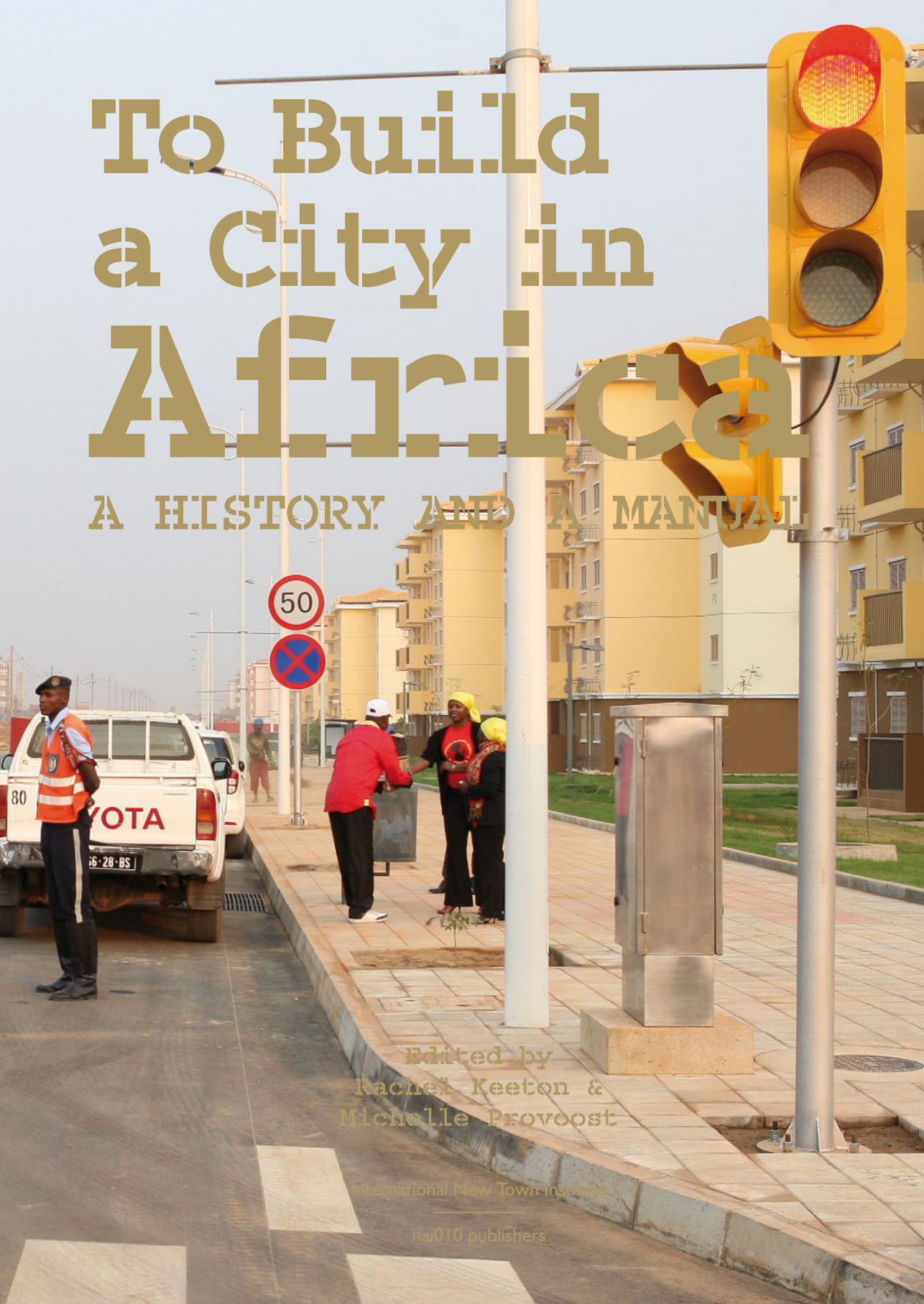


# To Build a City in Africa

A HISTORY AND A MANUAL



Edited by  
Rachel Keeton &  
Michelle Provoost

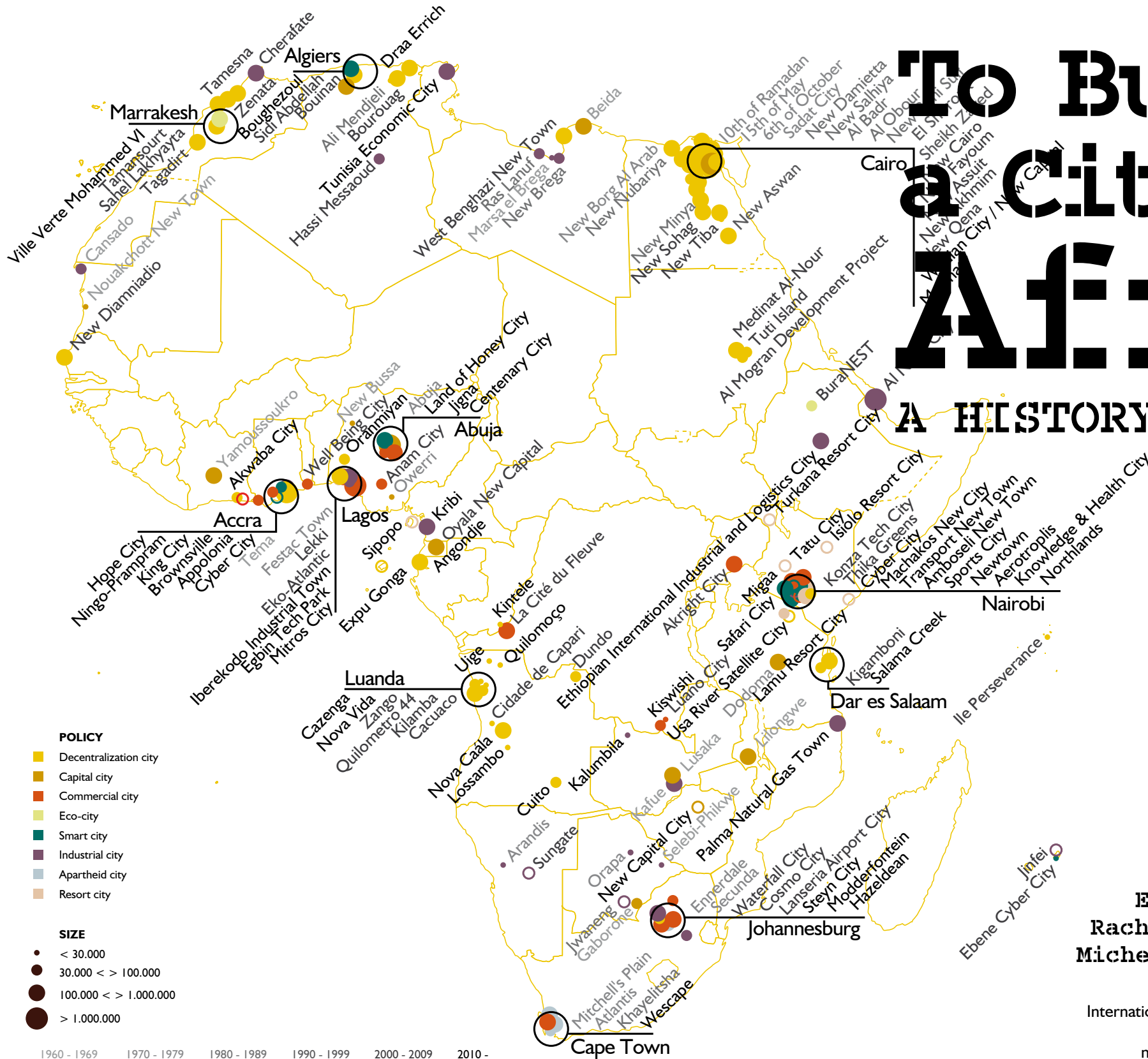
International New Town Institute

nai010 publishers

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A History and a Manual

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1 For further reading on these issues see: Cirolia, L.R. (2014) '(W) Escaping the Challenges of the City: a Critique of Cape Town's Proposed Satellite Town', *Urban Forum* 25: 295-312. And: Grant, R. (2015) 'Sustainable African Urban Futures. Stocktaking and Critical Reflection on Proposed Urban Projects', *American Behavioral Scientist* 59(3): 294-310. Also: Murray, M.J. (2015) 'Waterfall City (Johannesburg): Privatized Urbanism in Extremis', *Environment & Planning A* 47 (3): 503-520. And: Moser, S. (2015) 'New cities: Old wine in new bottles?' *Dialogues in Human Geography* 5(1): 31-35. And: Watson, V. (2013) 'African urban fantasies: dreams or nightmares?' *Environment and Urbanization* 26 (1): 215-231. And: van Noorloos, F. and Kloosterboer, M. (2017) 'Africa's new cities: The contested future of urbanisation', *Urban Studies* 55(6): 1223-1241.

## New Towns, Old Places: Four Lessons from Konza Techno City, Kenya

**Femke van Noorloos & Diky Avianto**

A new wave of African New Towns is on its way: large-scale utopian plans for masterplanned cities, often in public-private collaboration, abound across the continent. Although many of these ambitious plans are not yet realised, their effects are already appearing. While the UN-Habitat New Urban Agenda remains silent on the topic of New Towns, it clearly advocates for 'well-planned' solutions for rapid urban growth across Africa, and this matches the current landscape of large-scale, often top-down urban housing and infrastructure projects, including New Towns. Meanwhile inclusive urban development is also a key goal in the New Urban Agenda, as well as in Sustainable Development Goal 11, which deals with cities. The two policy documents refer to inclusiveness as a way of ensuring that different (particularly poor and marginalised or 'vulnerable') groups benefit from urban development and are included in decision-making. But what is needed to plan New Towns in a more inclusive manner, particularly among Africa's widespread diversity of social, spatial and economic circumstances?

This question must be viewed from multiple angles: while from-scratch planning and design can in theory offer new opportunities for inclusiveness, frequently mentioned problems that thwart inclusive development are: (1) the lack of accessibility and suitability of the new-built housing and services for a variety of groups (including the poor); (2) low accessibility and quantity/quality of newly created jobs and business opportunities; and (3) the issues of enclave development, socio-spatial segregation and governance fragmentation.<sup>1</sup> However, one key issue

that is often overlooked is how to deal with pre-existing and surrounding populations of the spaces where New Towns are planned, their access and rights to resources such as land and water, and how they can benefit or lose from the wide array of new developments surrounding New Towns.

Against the background of increasing land scarcity and global struggles over land rights, this problem raises concern, particularly given the large-scale and enclave character of many of the recently planned and announced New Towns in Africa. Indeed, the scale of the projected urban visions is such that dramatic changes in land tenure and use can be expected. In this essay, based on a critical assessment of New Town projects, we argue for more attention to the insertion of the New Town into the pre-existing socio-spatial context and more respect for the rights of local inhabitants. We also draw some very preliminary lessons learnt so far from recent African New Towns, many of which are still on the drawing board.

### Pre-existing resource rights

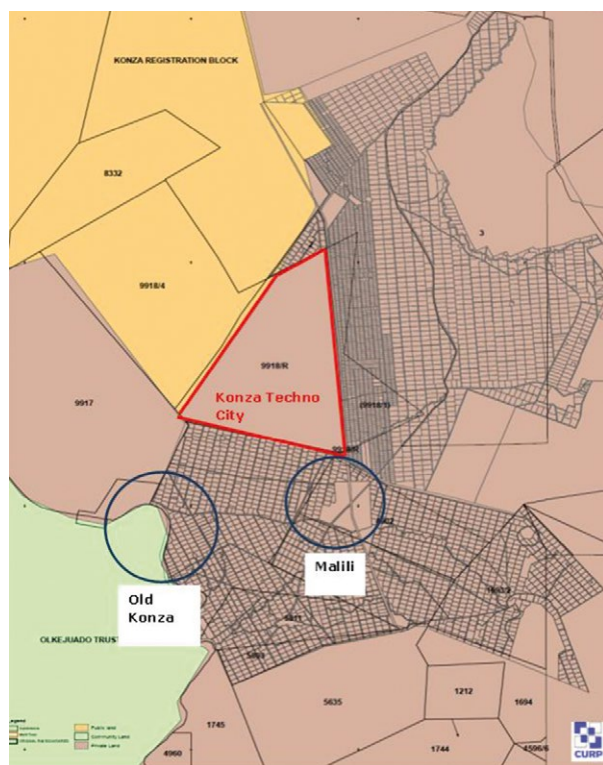
The challenge of inclusive planning while recognising pre-existing populations and resource rights starts with the issue of where New Towns are planned. Most African New Town plans are located in the peri-urban and suburban areas near existing (mainly capital) cities,<sup>2</sup> although there are also some examples of completely greenfield developments (e.g. the newly built capital of Equatorial Guinea), and of total inner city redevelopments or 'new cities within cities' (e.g. Addis Ababa and Kigali). While peri-urban New Town development seems at least preferable to inner city remaking from the point of view of preventing large-scale expulsions (although not from a compact city point of view), it is not problem-free. In reality, empty, unused or unclaimed land is extremely difficult to find, particularly around the largest cities which continue to grow. Instead, New Towns are often located on the rural-urban fringes, in particularly complex spaces with multiple intersecting land governance arrangements and diverse livelihoods; other towns are created on 'new land' reclaimed from water.<sup>3</sup>

The crux is in the frequent failure of states and private actors to recognise and adequately deal with customary and 'informal'<sup>4</sup> land, housing and resource rights as the *de facto* mode of tenure for a large part of African (peri-)urban dwellers. New Town projects managed by public-private partnerships or those led by international investors (including state-owned companies such as the Chinese ones) often rely on land being 'granted', 'leased' or 'freed' by the state, as for example in Konza Techno City, Kenya. However, the legitimacy of such actions is in many instances questionable, given long-standing customary land rights that risk being overruled. On the other hand, when land transactions are private-to-private and the landholdings are really largely unused, the process is less problematic at first sight (e.g. Tatu City near Nairobi, Waterfall City near Johannesburg<sup>5</sup>).<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, even in those instances problems can occur.

2 Van Noorloos, F. and Kloosterboer, M. (2017).  
3 Ibid.  
4 The notion of informality is critically debated and all but straightforward, see for example: Roy, A. (2005) 'Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning', *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71(2): 147-158.  
5 Murray, M. (2015).  
6 Van Noorloos, F. and Kloosterboer, M. (2017).

7 This argument can be taken further and include 'informal' or diverse ways of economic and business activities: new town designers can take up the existing commerce of the area (e.g. food, handicrafts) to make more inclusive economic linkages. However, walling and other types of segregation that are often evident in Africa's current new city plans preclude these types of developments.

Parallel to the danger of displacement that pre-existing villages may experience, there is also another interesting development around many planned New Towns: new migrants flock to the areas in anticipation of economic opportunities. They often form informal settlements around the borders of the projects. Hence these projects need to pay close attention to both pre-existing and new settlements around the New Towns, especially if they are regarded as informal. The governance dynamics of securing access to resources such as agricultural land, grazing land, and water by pre-existing and newly emerging surrounding populations (and land users), including the roles of different types of customary and other non-state authorities, need to be taken seriously.<sup>7</sup> New Towns with their all-encompassing character and modernisation agenda may reinforce the tendency to formalise and 'modernise' everything (e.g. 'clean the city' of street vendors, street hawkers, etc.), thereby intensifying different forms of displacement and exclusion.

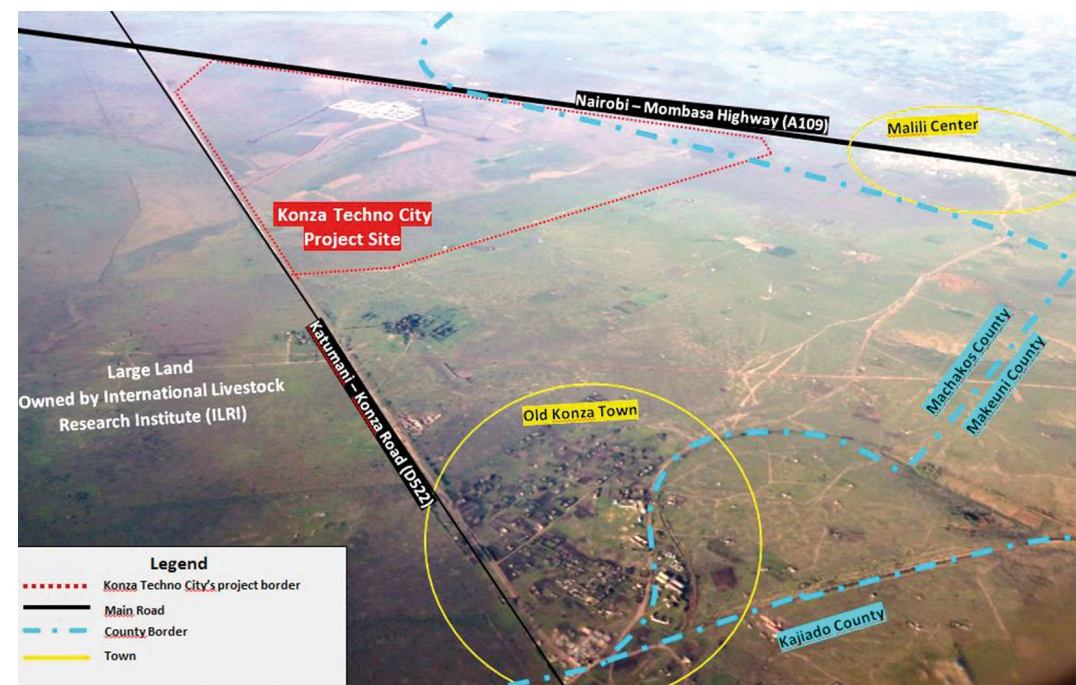


Land Tenure Situation  
(Source: Ministry of Lands,  
2013. Modified by D. Avianto)

## Four lessons

To take this discussion further, we have identified four important lessons to take into account how New Town planning can be more conscious of pre-existing and surrounding populations' rights and needs. These are partly based on a general view of current African New Towns, and illustrated with findings from empirical field research around Konza Techno City near Nairobi, Kenya. Konza is one example of an ambitious New Town plan managed by a Development Authority consisting of the Kenyan Ministry of Information and Communications in collaboration with a number of (mostly international) private developers. It is part of the Kenya Vision 2030 national development strategy to spearhead the country into a middle-income status with Information and Communication Technology as a main service sector. In this picture, Konza Techno City, 60 km south of Nairobi, is a major flagship project aimed at developing the 'Silicon Valley of Kenya' (or 'Silicon Savannah') and a major ICT hub with 17,000 jobs and 200,000 residents. The project is holistic and multifunctionally planned, and will include housing, offices / work, a university, a

hospital, schools, hotels, shopping, etc. However, it is suffering from delay and intra-governmental conflict, and has seen very little construction so far, although the newly installed government (2017) seems committed to continuing the project. Although most of the area to be developed is currently just grassland with a fence, land sales and speculation are ongoing. The national government leases the land (5,000 ha) to private developers for 99 years terms. The government bought the land in 2010-2011 from the representative of a privatised and subdivided former



Konza Techno City and its surrounding (Source: D. Avianto, 2017)

group ranch, and the process has involved some conflict and fraud (there is still a court case ongoing),<sup>8</sup> but no major involuntary or unwanted displacements. However, the creation of a buffer zone around the project is another complex issue, leading to our first lesson.

### I. The creation of buffer zones and land use regulations around the project can also lead to displacement and exclusion.

Around the 5,000 ha Konza Techno City project itself, a much larger buffer zone of 20,000 ha has been planned with the aim of keeping upcoming 'uncontrolled' informal and slum developments at a distance as they would become an 'eyesore' and discourage investors.<sup>9</sup> This reminds us of the colonial types of urban planning that used segregation in the form of *cordons sanitaires* or green buffer zones around the city, a form of segregation that was rationalised by those in power as a way to protect the city against infectious diseases.<sup>10</sup> Clearly an exclusionary idea in the first place, the buffer zone around Konza Techno City furthermore creates livelihood and land tenure insecurity for two communities present in the area: Old Konza and Malili.

The area, which was until recently very rural, is part of the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), where pastoralism is historically an important source of livelihoods. Malili or Malili Center used to be a group ranch under Kenya's group ranch policy, and its lands were subdivided among the members in 2006. The group ranch allocated land for a small commercial centre near the Nairobi – Mombasa highway, which is now the location of Malili Center. Around 2010 and 2011 there was slow growth, with

<sup>8</sup> Johari, A. (2015) 'Kenya's Konza Techno City: Utopian Vision Meets Social Reality', Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection. Paper 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Wapenaar, M. (2015) Formal Planning & Informal Settlement. The case of Konza Technology City, MSc thesis Universiteit van Amsterdam.

<sup>10</sup> Bigon, L. (2012). 'A History of Urban Planning and Infectious Diseases: Colonial Senegal in the Early Twentieth Century'. Urban Studies Research 2012, DOI: 10.1155/2012/589758

II Furthermore, it potentially creates governance conflicts between three involved county governments and federal government with the latter imposing its development planning on the first, thereby overruling existing spatial plans.

some structures such as shops and hotels. After the announcement of Konza Techno City in 2012, rapid development started, and the pieces of land were further subdivided and sold. Lots of newcomers from all over Kenya arrived, searching for job opportunities. The small town became more crowded and urbanised, with semi-permanent structures using iron sheets for both wall and roofing. The current population is estimated at 1,500 -2,000 residents. Malili developed rapidly devoid of planning and infrastructure provision. While subdivided plots initially had individual private ownership, rapid further subdivisions were not formalised, and an informal land buying and house rental market emerged, along with semi-permanent houses and buildings. Most inhabitants are recent migrants who arrived there less than 2 years ago. Currently the majority of people rent their houses, and the original shareholders of the group ranch mostly live elsewhere. Malili Centre is thus largely a residential and commercial town, with services such as shops, kiosks, hardware, food joints, water selling points, salons, small guest houses and roadside commerce. Most people's income is based on commercial activities and casual jobs.

Old Konza is a small town to the south of the Konza Techno City site. It was established in the 1970s when the first settlers came to this empty land and started farming and growing livestock in a collective manner. During that time, the land was owned by the government and people were considered squatters, but in the 1990s the government started giving out allotment letters of the land to each household. However, these letters do not provide particularly strong land tenure security, which is why people are still struggling to receive stronger types of ownership. Most inhabitants of Old Konza have lived there for a long time, between 10 and 30 years, and own their house. The housing structures are mostly permanent, and built with various materials such as iron sheets and bricks. Old Konza has not seen rapid development like in Malili, which is probably due to the further distance from the highway. Land use patterns and population have not changed much recently. Most people are farmers on their own lands and/or pastoralists. Old Konza also has a small market area with commercial activities such as shops, food joints, salons, etc.

The Konza Techno City buffer zone plans could endanger land rights and livelihoods in both towns. The first plan was to prohibit any land use in the zone; this subsequently changed to strict land use and construction regulations which are laid down by government in a comprehensive Local Physical Development Plan. Old Konza was assigned as a zone of 'modern agriculture' and Malili as a commercial and possibly residential zone. Inhabitants of both communities are largely uninformed about the buffer zone plans, and afraid their houses will be demolished as these do not fit the 'modern' image as laid down in the construction requirements.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, some informal structures have been assigned as 'to be demolished', but given project delays no further action has been taken.

As this example shows, careful evaluation of displacement effects should not only be based on direct project land, actual land leases or acquisition. It must also take into account that the creation of extra infrastructure



Malili - Buildings with X mark (soon to be demolished).  
(Source: D. Avianto, 2017)





Konza Techno City Project Fences. (Source: D. Avianto, 2017)

<sup>12</sup> Mwau, B. (2013) 'The planned hatches the 'unplanned'', *Living the City: Urban Africa*. Available at: [slumurbanism.wordpress.com/2013/08/02/the-planned-hatches-the-unplanned/](http://slumurbanism.wordpress.com/2013/08/02/the-planned-hatches-the-unplanned/).

<sup>13</sup> Van Noorloos, F., Klaufus, C., and Steel, G. (2018). 'Critical Commentary: Land in urban debates: Unpacking the grab-development dichotomy'. *Urban Studies*, e-pub ahead of print, DOI: 10.1177/0042098018789019.

and buffer zones can fuel displacements, and new regulations (for example on land use) can create livelihood insecurity. In order to enhance inclusiveness it is imperative that surrounding populations, particularly those in conditions of informal land tenure and housing, are integrated into New Town planning with respect for their livelihoods.

Of course, the issue is more complex than outright displacement of long-term inhabitants: as explained above, Malili was in fact created by recent settlers as well as developers who arrived in the past 10 years with prospects of urbanisation and new opportunities. This was greatly enhanced by the New Town plans which have recently sparked land speculation.<sup>12</sup> Malili's rapid growth points to the complexity of controlling informality around New Towns.

## 2. Diverse, flexible and mobile livelihoods and land uses are at higher risk.

In assessing the impacts of large-scale urban and peri-urban plans on land use and resource rights, a limited focus on direct displacement or expulsion of sitting land users tends to overlook important land users and livelihoods dependent on the spaces in other ways.<sup>13</sup> Particular groups which are often overlooked are mobile and temporarily inhabiting groups such as pastoralists, who move their herds around in search of fresh pasture land and water. As outlined above, Old Konza consists of long-term (partly Maasai) inhabitants with pastoralist and agriculture-based livelihoods. They experienced a loss of grazing land when the Konza project site was fenced. They now risk more livelihood loss due to the



Masterplan Konza Tech City. (Source: [www.shoparc.com](http://www.shoparc.com))

possibility of changing zoning of their lands to 'commercial' in the future, as anticipated in the development plan.

In general, people with flexible and mobile livelihoods are among those groups that tend to go unrecognised when it comes to land rights. This also includes urban farmers that use diverse 'empty' spaces in and around the city to farm or access resources. As they often lack formal recognition of this *de facto* land use, land is easily taken away by the state (notwithstanding the increasing attention to urban agriculture in policy debates). In various instances, New Town planning or initial construction has shown to affect the livelihoods of (peri-)urban farmers. For example, this was the case and/or is envisioned in la Cité du Fleuve in Kinshasa;<sup>14</sup> the New Town projects in Khartoum;<sup>15</sup> and Beira in Mozambique.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the creation of artificial islands and large-scale water infrastructure related to New Towns (e.g. the sea wall of Lagos<sup>17</sup> near Eko Atlantic new city) can put fishers' livelihoods at risk.<sup>18</sup>

## 3. The mere planning of the project can already have an impact.

The case of Konza Techno City, as well as many other New Towns, shows us that even if no real construction has happened yet, the mere existence of a New Town plan or idea already creates impacts.<sup>19</sup> Malili has experienced large-scale population growth and great land speculation, created by the promising opportunities of new infrastructures, employment and rising land prices around the New Town. This translates spatially into 'doughnut development' around Konza Techno City, with rapid settlement of people outside the fence in Malili, while the New

<sup>14</sup> De Boeck, F. (2011) 'Inhabiting ocular ground: Kinshasa's future in the light of Congo's spectral urban politics', *Cultural Anthropology* 26(2): 263-286.

<sup>15</sup> Zoomers, A., van Noorloos, F., Otsuki, K., Steel, G. and van Westen, G. (2017) 'The rush for land in an urbanizing world - from land grabbing towards developing safe, resilient and sustainable cities and landscapes', *World Development* 92: 242-252.

<sup>16</sup> Murtah Shannon, 2018, pers.comm.

<sup>17</sup> A sea wall to protect the coastline from flooding, promoted as the 'Great Wall of Lagos'.

<sup>18</sup> See also De Boeck (2011).

<sup>19</sup> For a more elaborate analysis of how New Towns are often speculative projects; in some cases creating a world city image and raising expectations of profit are the mere objective (hence fulfilled by only plans without the need for actual construction) rather than a by-product, see: Steel, G., Van





Main Entrance to Konza Techno City project. (Source: D. Avianto, 2017)

Noorloos, F. and Klaufus, C. (2017) 'The urban land debate in the global South: New avenues for research', *Geoforum* 83: 133–141.

<sup>20</sup> Mwu, B. (2013).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Datta, A. (2015) 'New urban utopias of postcolonial India: 'Entrepreneurial urbanization' in Dholera smart city, Gujarat', *Dialogues in Human Geography* 5(1): 3-22. Goldman, M. (2011) 'Speculative urbanism and the making of the next world city', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35(3): 555-581. Van Noorloos, F. and Kloosterboer, M. (2017).

Town site itself is still an empty field. Paradoxically these settlers are now facing a heightened sense of land tenure insecurity as a result of the buffer zone, but also as a result of rapid land speculation and multiple claims on one plot.<sup>20</sup> In addition, there is a wide gap between people's high expectations of employment and services on the one hand<sup>21</sup> and the very volatile and insecure nature of many New Town plans on the other. This was also clear in Old Konza and Malili villages, where people's positive and aspirational perceptions of the project have gradually made way for scepticism due to delays and political problems.

#### 4. High-level interests and rapid change cause problems for inclusiveness.

It is clear that current African New Towns are often backed by high economic and political interests; they are spectacular city-marketing projects, and the world city image they embody is supposed to attract investment as well as grant political power. In such situations governments (often as part of a development authority) tend to fast-track legal and regulatory procedures, including those related to land acquisition and resource use, thus posing a risk to land and resource rights such as fair compensation and expropriation procedures.<sup>22</sup>

In Konza Techno City, the central government clearly considered the project of national interest, and side-lined the relevant county governments in the process. Public participation and informed consultation of the inhabitants has hardly taken place. The speed of developments as soon as the green light was given probably left very little



Rendering of the transportation hub of Konza Tech City. (Source: www.shoparc.com)

room for this. Nevertheless, given the delays there may still be other opportunities and ways for the public to have a real say in their future.

## Conclusion

Africa's upcoming New Towns must be viewed through a number of critical lenses. Without denying the importance of other key inclusivity issues such as accessibility and suitability of housing for the poor, this paper has focused on the often forgotten fact that New Towns are inserted into real places with pre-existing activities, humans, and livelihoods which start to change and co-evolve as soon as an idea for a New Town is elaborated. Against that backdrop, we have noted that the peri-urban spaces where many New Towns are planned, are hardly ever empty, and insertion of new structures in such peri-urban locations brings its own risk of displacement and loss of rights.

While the specific developments around Africa's individually planned New Towns remain idiosyncratic and unique, preliminary findings suggest that we should pay attention to four dynamics: first, the planning of buffer zones as a very exclusionary way of dealing with informal settlement around the projects; second, the often indirect and elusive types of displacement that can happen when the spaces are inhabited by mobile, temporary populations; third, the dynamics of change that are introduced from the initial announcement of a New Town project onwards, thus generating its own process of change independent of the realisation of the project; and fourth, the high-level interests behind the New Towns, which increase the risk of fast-tracking procedures and loss of rights.

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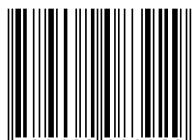
Tema (1960), Ghana. (Photo: M. Provoost, 2007)



**Africa has become the world's fastest urbanising continent. This urbanisation is a huge challenge in areas with fragile institutional frameworks and chronic poverty. Existing cities often become overcrowded and congested. In response to this, both state and private developers increasingly see a market for New Towns – comprehensively planned, mixed-use urban developments on greenfield sites. To illustrate the extent of this phenomenon, the authors calculate that if all the New Towns in Africa that were announced by 2018 meet their targets, 77 million people in Africa (or nearly 10 percent of the total urban population), will be living in New Towns by 2030.**

**In many cases, these New Towns end up attracting mainly international companies and catering exclusively to the middle- and upper-income groups, disregarding the low-income groups who make up the majority of Africa's urban dwellers, and failing to adequately address ecological vulnerabilities.**

**In *To Build a City in Africa* the authors explore the complex implications of these new developments through interviews with different stakeholders, in-depth case studies of five African New Towns, and essays that elaborate specific issues connected to these New Towns. An Atlas places these developments within a broader geographical and historical context, examining related aspects such as fertility, mortgage rates, and car ownership. The conclusions of the research are presented in the Manual, a set of ten design and planning principles. The Manual offers an alternative approach for planners, developers and other decision-makers aiming to construct more inclusive and sustainable New Towns in Africa.**



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