



2015 ICCASU Report

Collaboration for Sustainable Urbanization in China and Africa

A Canadian Perspective from the 2015 International Conference on Chinese and African Sustainable Urbanization

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**International Conference
on Chinese and African Sustainable Urbanization (ICCASU)**

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FOREWORD

It is our honor to present the ICCASU report on the outcomes from the 2015 International Conference on Chinese and African Sustainable Urbanization: A Canadian and International Perspective (ICCASU). Having taken place from October 24th-25th 2015 in Ottawa, the conference was held in partnership between the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat) and the University of Ottawa. With approximately 200 scholars, practitioners and policy-makers from 64 institutions, 18 countries, and across multiple disciplines, the conference was an excellent opportunity to explore urban challenges within China and African states, as well as the complex issues surrounding Chinese investments in African urban development, comparing them both with Canadian urban experiences. Canada's experience played an important role in the discussions during the conference, specifically because Canada has traditionally been engaged with development issues in many African countries for quite some time. As a result of this, we will begin contemplating the shifts in the Canadian approach to development and urbanization in African states. Moreover, as Canada's second economic partner, the conference had the chance to explore the Chinese context, specifically the ways in which China's engagement in African states differs from, and even acts as a substitute for, diminishing Western engagement. These findings demonstrate the importance of adopting a win-win approach regarding Canadian and/or Chinese engagement in African states, and for strengthening this triangulation.

We are also delighted to mention that this report will prove to be an insightful document to Habitat III, scheduled to take place next October in Quito, Ecuador.



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Executive Summary

The issues of urbanization have, for some time, been prevalent in both China and countries in the African continent, and have intensified with the acceleration of population growth, the relocation from rural to urban dwellings, the insufficiency of infrastructure and social services to a growing population, institutional failures, increased inequalities, and the intensification of gentrification, all in the context where previous interventions needed alternatives. This report discusses the outcomes of the International Conference on Chinese and African Sustainable Urbanization from a Canadian and international perspective by comparing and contrasting the experiences and transitions of urbanization within the socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts of Canada, China, and African countries. The report also focuses on the lessons learned within each context, as well as the benefits encountered by each experience.

Canada's contributions to urban planning, specifically its focus on good

institutions, community participation, and adequate, inclusive planning for successful and sustainable urban development, provide crucial lessons for China and African countries within their urbanization contexts. Canada's renewed leadership on the international platform enables for the realization of the meaning and implications of sustainable urban development.

In addition, China and Africa, while having achieved progress, still have much to learn from Canada as well as from one another. The rapid shifts from rural to urban life in Chinese cities, accompanied by the marginalization of migrant peoples and the lack of community engagement for planning, has created problems for China's urban poor, as well as environmental consequences. Moreover, African cities scrambling to adjust to the rapid pace of urbanization, having a current urban population of 40%, are lagging behind China's current urbanization experience. The pressures faced are of an economic, social, political and environmental nature in a context in which inadequate institutions exacerbate the situation.

Introduction

On October 23 - 25 2015, the first International Conference on Chinese and African Sustainable Urbanization: *A Canadian and International Perspective* was held at the University of Ottawa campus in collaboration with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN – Habitat). The issues of urbanization have, for some time, been prevalent in both China and countries in the African continent, and have intensified with the acceleration of population growth, the relocation from rural to urban dwellings, the insufficiency of infrastructure and social services to a growing population, institutional failures, increased inequalities, and the intensification of gentrification, all in the context where previous interventions needed alternatives. The individual panels of the Conference approached these issues within the respective country contexts, which also facilitated a cross-regional approach that enhanced analysis, the exchange of ideas, and the synthesis of new perspectives to urban planning and development. The opening proceedings of the Conference commenced with an

introduction by the Conference Co-President Dr. Huhua Cao of the University of Ottawa's Geography department and School of International Development and Global Studies. After wishing a warm welcome to all of the conference participants and esteemed Excellences, Dr. Cao presented the objectives of the Conference, including the exploration of the challenges of sustainable development within Chinese cities and those of African countries; the examination of Chinese investments in African urban development; comparing these challenges to that of Canada's own experiences with urbanization; and exploring the specifics of Canadian and Chinese engagement in African countries.

The topics and areas of discussion included the position, role and impact of China on the processes of urbanization in African countries, the methods of achieving sustainable urbanization in Africa, and the pressing issues currently faced by China and these countries in the process of sustainable urbanization. What is interesting and important to note about such an international issue is the

emphasis that the organizers of the conference have put on the Canadian perspective in such an international issue, especially since Canada's urban context is relatively recent compared to other cities around the world. However, the Canadian perspective is critical for the discourse on the issues of urbanization, as well as improved urban planning in China and Africa because Canada has been traditionally engaged with African countries for quite some time with less action for urban development. In this conference, the scholars and participants actively learned about the successful experiences and the lessons learned by Canada and other Western countries on urban development. There is no doubt that the success of this conference has had a profound impact on successful promotion of China and African countries towards achieving sustainable urban construction with the help of Canada. Canada has much to contribute internationally, and certainly while we face our own urban challenges, there is much that we can learn from the Chinese and African countries' urbanization experience, but at the same time, much that we can contribute to the improvement and

quality of international urbanization experiences. With the formation of our new Liberal government, we are excited about Canada's renewed presence and influence on the international stage.

This brief report on the ICCASU will compare and discuss the challenges and issues of sustainable urbanization in China and African states from a Canadian and international perspective. The intent is to capture the function and importance of collaboration for sustainable development, and to specifically highlight the 3-way relationship between Canada, China, and African cities, as well as to emphasize Canada's role in and impact on sustainable urbanization and development in this crucial conference. The 2015 ICCASU provided a platform for discussion and the synthesis of new perspectives in the nation's capital. While the conference explores the issues of sustainable urbanization for China and African countries, issues facing Canadian practices for sustainable urbanization are discussed at great length. The explorations of these challenges help to provide a different approach to solving the problems generated by

uncontrolled urbanization, and to demonstrate Canada's role and involvement in prospective solutions, an alternative to previous approaches.

Sustainable Urbanization: Lessons in Canadian Leadership

The way in which Canada's leadership in sustainable urbanization is represented in the conference is in its institutional practices for results-based management, community engagement, decision-making and capacity building. During the Keynote Speeches on the Canadian perspective on sustainable urbanization, Caroline Andrew from the University of Ottawa articulated that sustainable urbanization is fostered when social equality and community partnership is upheld, and that it is necessary to move towards social equality; integrating cross-sector partnerships is the ultimate goal for sustainable urbanization. It is the democratic way to include everyone involved along with their perspectives if we want to have a development and urbanization that is sustainable. In addition to the importance of social inclusion of marginalized groups for

working towards a sustainable urbanization is the importance of better planning through participatory processes and community involvement for sustainability, as expressed by Jonathan Barnett from the University of Pennsylvania. Complementing these two viewpoints, Joe Berridge from Urban Strategies in Toronto described the structure and mechanisms of community participation in Canada, offering a thoughtful assessment of its costs, benefits and limitations. Adding and complementary to the Canadian perspective, Piper Gaubatz, geographer and professor at the University of Massachusetts, focused on the spread of global models of urban design, especially how these urban models are reinterpreted in specific local contexts. She concentrated on the discussion of a case study on urban redevelopment of the Chinese city Xining in the province of Qinghai, highlighting the interpretations of geographic vocabulary in the context of cultural differences.

What can be taken from the insightful perspectives shared by these professionals is the premise that "to fail to plan is to plan to fail," and that

community participation is one of the most characteristic aspects of planning in Canada, and the West generally. This planning process is perhaps fundamentally different compared to those of Chinese and African cities. Attendees came away with a better understanding of concerns that Canadian planners and experts have about the form that new development is taking in China and the African continent, as a whole. It is certainly the hope of the ICCASU that going forward, China and Africa can begin to associate with such a perspective to enhance their own capacity building, improve urbanization processes, and thus create a more sustainability. The Canadian perspective throughout the ICCASU is one that places emphasis on equality for all, strong institutions, and adequate and inclusive planning. Canada's current international platform and leadership will help through collaboration with China and the African continent to improve their contexts and to increase the sustainability of urban cities through our own lessons and perspectives on planning.

China's Urban Experience

The ICCASU explored the issues of urbanization pertaining to the Chinese context in comparison and contrast to that of Africa's contexts. As China encounters a rapid demographic shift from rural to urban, its cities and people are suffering as a result. Continued rapid urbanization is expected until 2050. This trend of accelerated urbanization that China has undergone in the last four decades has positioned the country as the world's second largest economy, but has also made evident substantial challenges for future development as highlighted by Chaolin Gu from Tsinghua University. Peking University's John Zacharias examined the decline of community ties and the breakdown of social ties, as well as the marginalization of rural peoples who lack a voice in any community engagement for planning. If looking at the Canadian perspective for reference, any efforts at sustainability would inevitably require these ties. In the case of China it would be logical to assume that urban population growth is accompanied by increasing urban density. In the Chinese context, we

instead see a weakening of density, occurring in more than half of Chinese cities, according to Zacharias. This phenomenon is the result of a “making-way” for a new middle class with residential aspirations. Also, rising housing inequality in China is a result of market forces, but also of institutional constraints from the research presented by Erbiao Dai and Yan Li from Kyushu University, and Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University of Japan respectively.

Some scholars suggest that in addition to the above-mentioned issues, Chinese cities that are generally encountering accelerated change should establish environmental objectives, concentrating on new urban residential development, technological progress, and sustainable transportation systems. Yangfan Li from Xiamen University in China argues that accompanying rapid urbanization are the environmental issues that plague China, and so environmental standards must be put in place when considering residential development. Prospective solutions that were proposed throughout the panels on the Chinese context include, but are not limited to, an increase

in China-based non-governmental organizations, which might provide an alternative model for the development of civil society, as well as urban governance, which was suggested by Dingping Guo from Fudan University. Other issues of urbanization in the Chinese context discussed in the panels include migrant enclaves, food security, and issues facing minority groups such as those of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

Urbanization and African Cities

Over the past 100 years, the global population has transformed its habitat from being primarily rural to becoming increasingly urban, with a current urban population of 50%. However, this process is unbalanced as the urbanization process continues to accelerate at an alarming pace, with countries scrambling to adjust politically, socially, economically, as well as environmentally. Currently, an estimated 40% of Africa’s population is deemed urban, and it is projected that this percentage will increase towards up to 56% by 2050. If we compare the urbanization experience in African

countries to that of China, Africa is lagging far behind in terms of growth, urban planning and governance.

In this context, Mebometa Ndongo from Carleton University in Ottawa explored the issues that urbanization raises in Africa, such as situations where more than 70% of the population cannot have access to services. 80% of it is burdened by bureaucratic informality, socio-spatial imbalances, questionable contracts and social inequalities in many of its countries' cities; and thereafter, in his third caption, he frames the challenges of urban development in terms of physio-spatial and politico-institutional urban productivity, municipal decentralization of endowments and adjustments as a framework for building and regulating urban affairs, as well as promoting urban governance in a given territory. Taking into consideration the lessons learned from past interventions which fail to deliver adequate urban development in Africa, Mebometa Ndongo underlined the lack of capacity to plan, build, and maintain urban infrastructures. Thus, he emphasized the importance of adequately training city planners. As

we will see, Africa has much to learn from Chinese and Canadian experiences as well, if it is to be successful in delivering projects and programs that would foster a sustainable urban development.

If the rapid urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa can be captioned as a constraining source of both positive and negative impacts, this is especially highlighted in the case of Burundi while the Nigerian case study is used to demonstrate the challenging issues of security, especially in Lagos, one of the African continent's mega cities. The population resilience, as analyzed in Tanzania's Dar es Salaam case by Aekbote Lakshminarayanan from Université de Grenoble of France, requires some structuring. To reach sustainable urbanization in many African countries, the new planning agendas for cities in countries like Morocco (e.g. Sarah Moser & Laurence-Côté Roy from McGill University) or at the national level including housing programs that Angola is implementing (e.g. Ana Inglis from the National Housing Department of Angola) are exposed. However, there is no success in urbanization, or for that matter

development, if projects are not well managed; and bad project management can take a toll on urbanization performance, as articulated by Lavagnon Ika from the University of Ottawa. Extrapolating from this, he went on to suggest that project sponsors, planners, and implementers should understand why projects fail. Finally, he concluded that they must pay a good deal of attention to project management traps, such as the notion of managing all projects in the same way; monitoring for the sake of monitoring; lack of capacity to take on projects; and last but not least, cultural errors.

In terms of the control of emerging towns, the urban “metabolism” approach is presented in the Ethiopian case to analyze outcomes of human activities highlighting multidimensional inputs and outputs, which make town planning more optimal. The socioeconomic potential, local strength and knowledge must be appreciated, as well as the contributions made by organizations or enterprises towards urban investments. The focus must not only be limited to promoting the use of technology

without considering the fact that local realities and culture are part and parcel of real industrialization. This can, of course, still be useful for new urban experiences such as telehealth or using renewable energy. The presentation by Grace Adeniyi Ogunyankin from Carleton University examined the case of Nigeria’s Eko Atlantic city as the luxury city of Africa, which is said to be the urban revolution in Africa that will make its cities more functional and sophisticated. It is regarded as the ‘paradigm shift’ that can place Africa in a different light. However, while rapid urbanization in the case of Nigeria might be a blessing, it is also a huge challenge for other African states and cities, and rapid urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa is questioned in terms of whether it is a source of development or a source of poverty for the population. ICCASU appears as an avenue and a platform through which scholars and practitioners from the African continent can discuss current issues and visions for the future of urbanization, in cooperation with local actors.

China vs. Africa

If we look at the way in which ICCASU presents the urbanization experiences and perspectives in both China and the African cities discussed, we can see that Africa can learn much from China. Indeed, one of the fundamental questions explored throughout the Conference is whether China is building African cities, or whether these cities are building themselves, and what the right answer could be. Currently, China is involved in a wide range of infrastructure, capacity development, manufacturing, and other projects in African cities, which have the potential to positively alter the lives of the urban poor through improved services, infrastructure, living conditions, and long-term job creation. As the High Commissioner of the Republic of Cameroon in Canada, *his Excellency Anu'a-Gheyle Solomon Azob-Mbi* reminded us during the Luncheon Conversation, all of these considerations seem to forget one fact of importance, which is that the relationship between the African continent and China date back to the 17th century. His Excellency concluded

his presentation by asking participants to reflect on China's Economic Reform and Open-Door Policy of Deng Xiaoping, and to see how African could benefit from these positive experiences. In response to these questions and considerations, the Director of the UN-Habitat Programme Division, Alioune Badiane and the Director of Angola's Development Workshop, Allan Cain, insisted on some of the key areas that would help to boost Africa's sustainable urbanization. These key areas include: (1) education, (2) planning, (3) research, and (4) collaboration and partnership between Africa, China, and Western stakeholders, such as the University of Ottawa and other ICCASU partners. This triangulation of education and sustainable planning, forged with true collaborative research demonstrates that China's experiences with rapid urbanization can inform African approaches to urban development and poverty reduction. Alioune Badiane expressed in a Keynote Speech on a comparison of African and Chinese urbanization that while China encounters severe environmental challenges, Africa lags behind China's economic prowess due to poor institutions, lack of political

will, and bad governance. Furthermore, Africa's slow economic growth makes accommodating urbanization difficult with many people living in slum conditions. While China certainly still has some ways to go to improve its severe environmental issues, the comparison of China and Africa in the ICCASU demonstrates that while Africa can undoubtedly learn from China's context, positive change is imminent. In addition, Jean Marie Cishahayo, a specialist on Chinese and African Sustainable Cooperation presented that Africa is at a crossroads searching for the best sustainable urbanization model. In his view, China has both some capacities and limits in sustaining the construction of cities in Africa. This creates room for innovative insights for collaboration and exchange with Canada and other developed nations. To achieve this objective, a triangular collaboration between Canada, China and Africa will help to achieve the aforementioned goals, and is a perspective that benefits all parties.

Moreover, Tonton Mundele from Peking University articulates that the successful experiences of China in urbanization could inspire African

countries, especially the spillover effects of urbanization on industrialization and the quality of life of local people. However, some reservations are expressed concerning the positive impact of urban practices in African countries on poverty reduction in comparison with China, given the level of African city development. He nevertheless agrees with Zhengli Huang from Tongji University of China, referring to the need to take into account Chinese and African countries' contextual particularities and specificities, including the quality of the impacts of Chinese investments in infrastructure on economic development in African cities. Once again, as Lavagnon Ika noted, we cannot afford to let our projects fall into a cultural trap; they will fail otherwise.

Focusing on the issue of the contribution of Chinese and Canadian companies to sustainable urbanization in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Matundu Lelo from Université du Québec à Montréal focuses on the need for these companies to list their actions from an angle of sustainability, and, as it is done in China and Canada,

situating *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)* as an essential requirement. The case of the Sino-Congolese Cooperation Project is illustrative, as it demonstrates specifically the component of social infrastructure and the lack of appropriate strategies and policies in the areas of intervention. Emphasis is placed on the relevance of referring to past experiences in the DRC and elsewhere, as well as the need for the involvement of other actors in thinking about better strategies and action policies (such as civil society, universities, diaspora, etc.).

Climate Change in China and African Cities

When examining the specificities of climate change and its effects on sustainable urban development, two very important questions arise. The first is whether adverse changes in climate push people out of rural areas because of reduced agricultural productivity. Strong evidence suggests that this is the case. The second question is whether that push increases the total income of local cities. There is evidence supporting this

hypothesis in districts that produce tradable manufacturing.

The report entitled “Has climate change driven urbanization in Africa?” (2015) concluded that with a high dependence on agriculture and an already highly variable and often marginally suitable agro-climate, Africa may be at higher risk from climate change than most other regions in the world. However, technological change in these countries has been slow and despite frequent droughts in the past, irrigation infrastructure remains scarce. With so many farmers facing adverse climate conditions, the only option may be to migrate to urban areas. Several experts suggest that agro-climatic conditions do indeed influence urbanization and unfavorable conditions leading to greater urban population growth. The most complicated problem is that cities contribute over 60% of carbon dioxide (Co₂) and greenhouse gases (GHGs) emissions in Africa, also having a direct impact on climate change.

These challenges were addressed during the ICCASU. Elum Anne Zelda of University of South Africa discussed

the role of renewable energy. China and Africa are experiencing increasing urbanization, which places pressure on inadequate infrastructure and facilities of cities and towns especially in transportation and energy production which is a major source of emissions. This suggests that GHGs will be emitted unless there is an investment in the development of renewable energy resources. The current and impending adverse effects of this climate change demand for the reduction of GHGs emissions. Yangfan Li from Xiamen University addressed climate change and urbanization in China as a comparison. He discussed an early warning approach for coastal urbanization and landscape ecological change in China. Large scale urbanization in the coastal zones in China causes significant transformations in the interfaces of land, atmosphere and ocean which can be damaged over both short and long timelines with climate change. His research focuses on the coupled system of the coastal urbanization and environment at a landscape scale using an integrated systematic assessment approach. This can also be used in African countries. Bani Taha Omar

from the University of Ottawa addressed these changes in a different way. He talked about investigating the potential of tabletop natural user interface tools in improving the NUNAliit cyber-cartographic Atlas framework. According to him, geography plays a vital role in understanding modern global changes such as socio-economic, climate, and political transformations.

Climate change and its implications in negative aspects of sustainable development in developing countries especially in China and the African continent needs further research and alternative responses in the future. One specific question for consideration might be whether practical experiences from Canada and other environmentally progressive nations can serve as an inspiration for China and African countries. Canada, traditionally a leader in environmental sustainability, can help to promote and encourage the kind of awareness and dedication to the environmental changes needed to procure environmental health, and naturally extending from that, sustainable urban development. Strong, collaborative

research along with capacity-building is needed for this to be explored.

Re-Thinking Urbanization: What Have We Learned?

The ICCASU brought to the forefront very pertinent issues specific to sustainable urbanization within the Canadian, Chinese and African contexts. It highlighted different perspectives moving from Canada outward, and how the effects of urbanization and its projects differed depending on the context, especially the levels of institutional and economic development. The Conference emphasized the importance of community and social ties, as well as adequate planning for sustainable development success. African countries have much to learn from China's urbanization experience and planning, and China has much to learn from Canada in terms of the importance of community density and social ties for the benefit of planning and an urban development for all. Extending from this, both China and Africa as a continent can learn much from Canada's own shortcomings - which

enabled it to become a leader in its concern for sustainable development - as they continue to embark on their own paths towards an urbanization that is clean, efficient, equal, and sustainable. The ICCASU leaves us with valuable questions and new perspectives. For example, how do the complex issues of economic growth, urbanization, inequality, and social tensions intersect within these regions and their cities, and what are the main challenges that we need to address when it comes to identity-based tensions in global urbanism today? Also, how can good project management help to bridge the gap between strategic planning and implementation? These are important questions when considering the societal implications of urbanization patterns, and its effects on human, economic, and social capital. The discourse that the Conference provides leaves us with new perspectives for sustainable, effective urbanization.

Moreover, there is a need to distinguish between urban planning, which is more of a focus on the processes involved, vs. urban management and governance. It is also important to define terms such

as *human development*, since there are many different notions, perspectives and approaches to “development.” Extending from this point, we also need to define such notions as “informal settlement” and “vulnerability” as a result of the former, and how human and social capital play a key role for vulnerable groups. Fundamentally, the discourse of the conference emphasized, on the one hand, the impacts and consequences of rapid, uncontrolled urbanization for the marginalized, the importance of the informal sector in helping marginalized people meet their basic needs and the social problems that inevitably result; on the other hand, the lack of specific training structures will limit the production of experts, technical and human resources for tangible urban development. The ICCASU was transparent in its discourse, humble in its admissions that there are problems with the Habitat agenda that need to be addressed, such as the destructive causes of uneven development in these regions. Canada, as an outstanding example of good governance, makes it possible for others to realize that governance is a challenging issue for the cities in question, and there is no

doubt that good governance will help achieve sustainability and further progress. How can we promote the ‘Just’ city and the ‘Right to the city’ in these contexts, specifically, how do we help in the application of these Canadian values? We have learned that collaboration with adequate role models is key, and that while Canada stands firm in its support for positive change on the international stage, that collaboration and not imposition is also crucial.

Fulfilling the subtitle *A Canadian Perspective*, the conference demonstrates Canada’s strength and leadership role in urban development and sustainability. Moving forward, we are optimistic and confident that Canada’s continued relationship and newfound collaboration with China and respective African countries in their urbanization issues, especially those related to the challenges of developing their own cities will be a fruitful and beneficial one. We hope to support, encourage, as well as earn from the continued growth and prosperity of these regions, standing on guard not only for ourselves, but for the benefit of a sustainably safer, more equal world.

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