

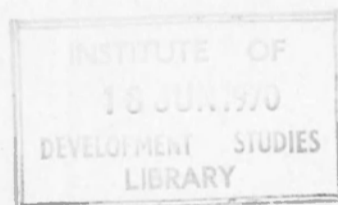
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RETROSPECT AND URBAN RESEARCH NEEDS

by

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These papers are prepared as a basis for Seminar discussion.
They are not publications and are subject to revision.

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This following paper is a draft of a concluding chapter for 'Urban Challenge in East Africa' which is to be published by the East African Publishing House later this year. This book will be an inter-disciplinary collection of Essays which have been prepared by scholars from the three East African University Colleges and edited by the author of this concluding paper.

John Hutton.

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RETROSPECT AND URBAN RESEARCH NEEDS

As indicated in my Introduction the original stimulus to prepare this inter-disciplinary collection of papers came at the time of the University Social Science Conference held at Makerere University College at the end of 1968 and early in 1969. Because of this beginning all of the papers in this book are the work of academics who are mainly concerned with the Social Sciences. However it is not our intention that this book should be regarded simply as a collection of papers of narrow historical or scholarly interest or to suggest that urban problems are, or should be, solely the concern of social scientists. Rather our purpose is to direct greater attention to the practical problems of urban growth and inter alia of the demands these place on the society as a whole. It would be inappropriate for me, as editor, to attempt any elaborate summation of the problems and issues raised or of the merits of one or other of the previous chapters. Rather my main purpose in this Retrospect is to summarise the main issues raised and to suggest areas for future research. Our hope is that this limited and heterogenous collection of papers will both draw attention to urban problems and stimulate useful research and more informed policy making.

The East African Urban Scene

Perhaps one of the most comprehensive assessments of the regions urban problems was that contained in the 1953-54 East Africa Royal Commission Report.¹ It is remarkable how the conclusions of that report, prepared considerably prior to Independence, still have a relevance and validity for the information presented in many of the papers included in this collection.¹ Now as then, a main impression is of the limited urban tradition in East Africa as compared to other parts of Africa, notably

¹ East Africa Royal Commission
1953 - 1955 Report, H.M.S.O.
CMD 9475 Reprinted 1961. pgs 200-248.

West Africa, which had a substantial urban life before the arrival of Europeans. In East Africa this was not generally the case, except perhaps in the Arab trading ports of the coast. Thus East Africa's cities and large towns are largely a recent phenomena, primarily associated with such alien influences as European administration and mission establishments and European and Asian trading and commercial centres. Some reasons for the limited African urban development include the primarily rural orientation of much of local life, the very low urban wage levels which kept earning possibilities low, and the high building and other standards which were imposed by successive governments. Moreover during most of the colonial time towns grew slowly and only during the post-war period has expansion been more rapid. The European settlements remained confined to small numbers and the larger and more rapidly growing Asian community limited to restricted areas, trades and occupations. By and large these alien communities to East Africa remained close knit and inward looking groups. Such a social structure was hardly conducive to any rapid expansion of urban living by Africans, except on the outskirts of the established European and Asian settlements. More recent developments have led to a rapidly changed situation and an increase in the numbers of Africans moving to the towns, to obtain qualifications and jobs which integrate them more firmly into an urban society. The emergence of a new and quickly growing African ruling and middle class has greatly accelerated these tendencies.

The Drift to the Town

It is apparent from several papers that one may speculate at length as to whether the movement to the city is or has been a 'push' or 'pull' phenomena. Many people obviously come to towns because 'static' conditions in the rural areas combined with the rapid net increase in population offers little in the way of foreseeable economic growth or personal advancement. Alternatively, for others the move to

towns may be part of a pathological expansion towards what Miss Ward describes as urban "cell creation".² In the words of the composer, 'how are you going to keep them down on the farm -- once they have seen Paris?' has come to have an East African meaning. Certainly it is often difficult to see any direct correlation between urban wage levels and the desire of people to move to towns. It appears that many people are inclined to move to towns more or less on a 'speculative motive' rather than on any positive assurance of gaining substantial or sustained urban employment. Related to this is not only the 'push' of rural poverty and boredom but also the intricate tribal and family relationships which link African people together. Plainly all these issues within themselves have and will continue to provide a fertile field for substantial interdisciplinary research.

Urban Land Tenure and Use

It also seems that central to the problems of urban growth is the question of land tenure and use. The colonial system developed on the basis of both a division of land and the division of employment opportunities related to different racial groups. Within the existing East African towns a greater part of land is publicly owned to the city boundaries and allocated or zoned for specific purposes. Within the city boundaries there has been a system of lease-hold plots and a tradition of temporary leases. On the outskirts of the metropolitan areas land is more usually held on a customary tenure basis. Some of these plots are bought and sold, but such arrangements give little basis for security of title or for the full development of sites. Plainly an important role for research should be to provide a fuller, more detailed knowledge of

² Ward B. The Economist, December 1969.
Pages 56 - 62.

land tenure systems, together with an ability to propose positive remedies and improvements to the existing situation. For instance it would seem desirable to enable people to obtain longer leases according to the building requirements. Moreover in outlying areas there are often rights which amount to tenure and here again it would seem desirable to allow for a wider use of freehold titles. Land questions would seem to be an area which are especially suitable for inter-disciplinary work; economists, lawyers, geographers, sociologists, government officials and land agents working towards the solution of specified problems.

Housing, Poverty and Degradation

Other major problems arise out of the issues associated with housing; notably its adequate provision for lower income groups. All too frequently an ambitious programme of urban redevelopment means that the people who lose their homes do not regain them. Part of the difficulty is the concern to build houses to standards laid down by rigid township regulations and standards. In practice of course there is often a lack of sufficient financial and other resources for high standard buildings. Thus any ambitious programme of reform within a town leads to a 'pushing out' of the recent immigrant population to just outside the official boundaries of the town itself, often in conditions of poverty, overcrowding and degradation. Such overspill areas frequently lack even essential services. Various suggestions have been made as to ways of relaxing housing and construction standards in such ways as to encourage more people to build houses. One possible line of development is that in some zones service facilities could be provided, but the building standards would be unregulated. The aim would be to encourage more recent arrivals to build their own houses, while at the same time every attempt should be made to encourage improvement in the quality of such houses by advances in the techniques, materials and skills available for this purpose. Here again is a most important area for research conducted on an inter-disciplinary basis. The questions to be asked would include the provision of more detailed information about the present

situation and what it is likely to become, given the continuation of present pressures. Once this information has been obtained other questions would concern the resources available to assist solutions. For instance in which ways can such essential services as water, sewage, power and hard roads be best provided on a minimum cost basis? Likewise how does the existing land tenure system influence the type of services and housing which are being provided, or could be provided at low cost levels. Moreover what is the best form of building in such circumstances and how might traditional housing be improved so as to provide adequate accommodation within the financial circumstances of the community at large. All these types of issues constitute urgent and fruitful areas for impartial and detailed research.

Administration, Education and Growth

Plainly many of the problems associated with urban matters are also associated with the administrative system. East African cities, despite their limited size, and in many cases short histories, are areas of great contrast and diversity of human experience. It is desirable to encourage the growth of towns in such a way as the members of the various races can live on equal footing. At the same time it must be recognised that many town dwellers, because of their lack of substantial previous experience of town or city life, face unusual social needs and problems. There is the necessity for a wide comprehension of these types of difficulties and of the creation of administrative machinery to link the problems of growth to the problems of education for town and city living. These issues impose a particular responsibility on central government to recognise the problems created for local government by the rapid increase in urban size.

This leads to a further consideration touching on the nature of the society itself. Clearly many of the problems of the East African urban scene are shaped by the poverty of the economy as a whole. Thus

if the problem of the urban environment are to be at all soluble there is a need for expansion in underlined economic growth. Even given such expansion there is the additional question of establishing sound priorities for private and public expenditure, which touches on both the distribution of wealth between various social classes and between the regions of the three countries. Plainly there can be no simple or overall answer to such questions, nevertheless a more sustained body of ongoing economic and social research could at least make some of the issues clearer and facilitate more effective decision making by the political and administrative system. At a minimum the results of such research should make choices clearer, the range of perceived alternatives wider and the costs of course A as opposed to course B more apparent.

Balance and Synthesis of Aims

The balance of diverse considerations must always be emphasised in practical research and decision making procedures. Thus far the main weight of my remarks have been primarily concerned with social and economic questions. Yet it must also be recognised that, of necessity, many of the issues of vital concern in the urban scene involve basic research in the natural sciences, and in such applied fields as building, construction and engineering. The changing East African cities place a responsibility on the scientist, the engineer and especially the architect to evolve designs which will meet both social needs and costs and at the same time be practical structures within the context of the total urban environment. As Ove Arup, the distinguished consulting engineer, points out: 'architectural design is much more complicated than an engineering design'³. This is mainly because engineering structures cater for the force of gravity and other natural phenomena, whereas buildings cater for people. And people are complicated. The engineer need not bother about the purpose of the design — he is told what is required. The architect bothers very much. He must study human needs, human reactions to environment, human ways of life, humans at work and

³O. Arup, 'The Architect and the Engineer', Gold Medal Address at the Royal Institute of British Architects, London. Building I July 1966.

play, their need for privacy and social contacts. This is both a complicated and controversial subject. And because he caters for human beings, the artistic organisation becomes so much more important. And even the technical data which have to be considered tend to be more numerous and varied. So, naturally, the synthesis of aims and means is more complicated. The quality of this synthesis depends on two things: the completeness of the data on which the design is based; and the intensity and quality of the mental effort expended on it. Naturally enough most designs, or in fact every design if you want to be critical, suffer from defects on both counts'. These are of course by no means issues which are limited to East African cities. Nevertheless they do have a peculiar force because of the complex social relationships involved. Here then is another fruitful and vital area for inter-disciplinary research efforts.

Research Organisation and Focus

Finally a few comments about the relationship between East Africa's urban problems and research organisation. The papers included in this book reflect the wide diversity of issues involved in urban problems though it must be emphasised that the collection, as it stands, concentrates heavily on the role of the social sciences and leaves untouched the potential contribution of the natural applied sciences. It is important to recognise the need for urban research conceived on a broad basis so as to cover the diversity of issues and disciplines involved. At the same time it is desirable that individual pieces of research be defined as closely as possible within the broader field of inquiry. In practice the scale, diversity, and rapidly changing nature of problems makes it peculiarly difficult for those actively engaged to take other than a specialist or sectional view. Thus a main function of the outside researcher should be to view the issues from a general and uncommitted as opposed to a particular and committed position of interest. Moreover there is a prime need for more effective institutional arrangements to

focalise urban research needs, to encourage the organisation and financing of research on a sensible basis and to facilitate the transmission of results to users. There is also a need for such arrangements to create a body of opinion whereby policy makers may be 'educated' into a recognition of the need for dealing with urban problems on an integrated basis.

Overseas urban research needs have, to a degree, been met by the creation of urban research centres, which are generally associated with a university though they often have autonomy of financing and staff. In England those which come to mind include the Urban Studies Centre at University College London, and the Urban and Regional Studies Centres' in the Universities of Manchester and Birmingham. In Australia there is an Urban Studies Unit associated with the Australian National University in Canberra, while in the United States of America there are many such Centres, including the well-known joint Harvard-Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Urban Studies Centre and the Institute of Urban Life in Chicago. The question arises whether there is place for the creation of such institutions in East Africa. In the view of the author, it would at the present time, be premature to work for such a Centre, in light of both the scarcity of financing and staff available and the separatist tendencies which are apparent in the three countries. Rather it would seem to be more sensible to work for urban research interests within the framework of the existing social science centres including the Makerere Institute of Social Research in Kampala, the Institute of Development Studies in Nairobi, and the Bureau of Economic Research in Dar es Salaam.

The contributions to this book indicate that there is already an active interest in urban problems by members of all these Centres. There is however an urgent need to focus urban studies further on an East Africa wide basis. This might be achieved by the creation of an East African society for urban research which could have associated with it a new Journal of Urban Studies. It would of course be essential to prevent such a society or journal from degenerating into just another

academic body. It would be necessary that in formation and in the running of such institutions that practical people involved in applied problems should be continually brought into close contact with the academic researcher. Our best hope is that this first collection of papers may do something to encourage developments of this sort. Certainly in view of the growing 'Urban Challenge in East Africa' the need is urgent; let us hope that the time is also right.

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