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Africa: from a continent of states to a continent of cities

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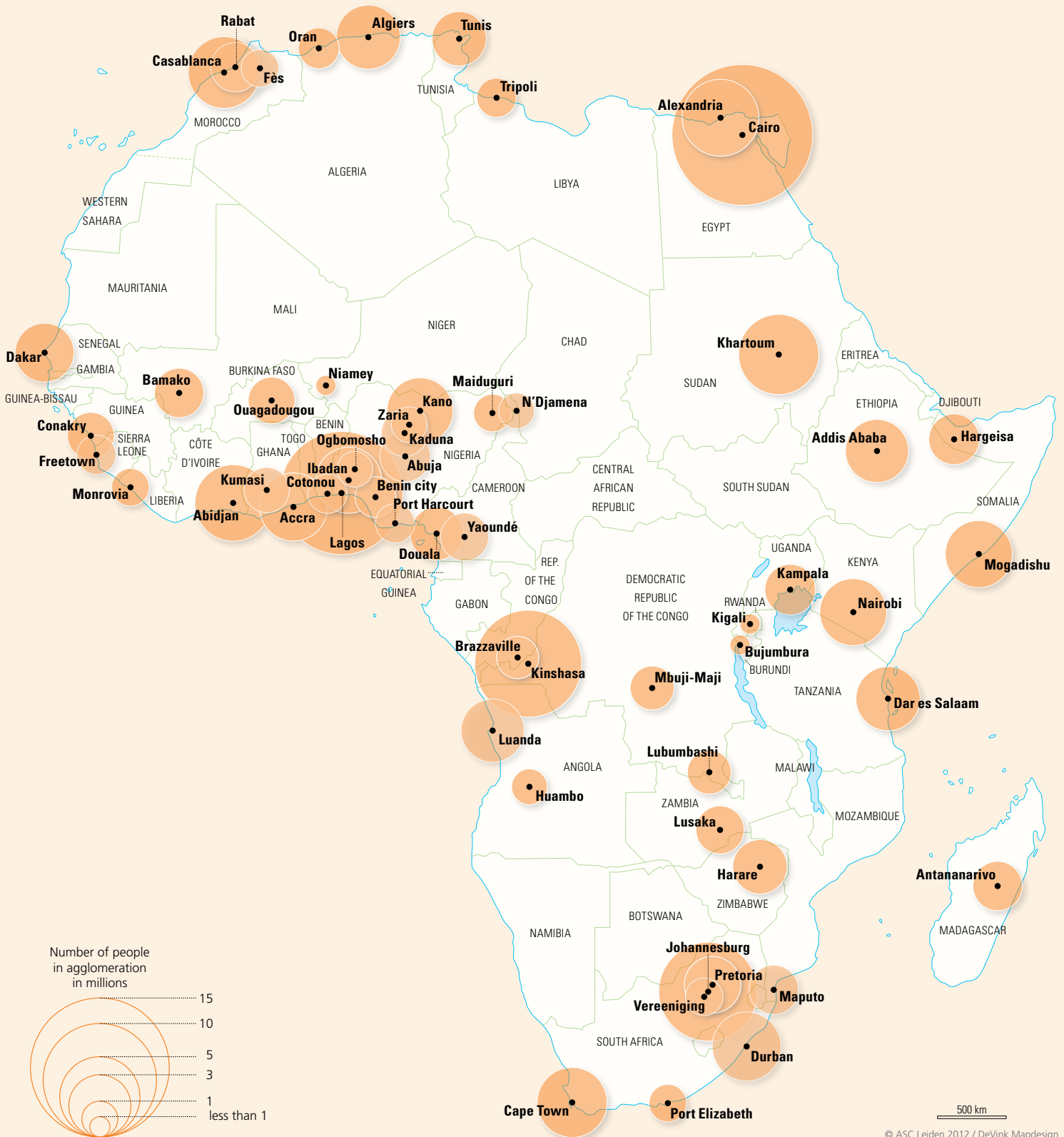
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Africa: From a Continent of States to a Continent of Cities



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The map has been symbolically adjusted to show the size of the agglomeration related to the 'circle of influence', and the hinterland that is most likely influenced by the city as a market, as a source of ideas and as a source of inputs for agricultural development. Of course these circles of influence are not really circles: roads (and in some cases railways) work as 'spikes' of influence and, depending on the costs of transport and security along the transport axes, farmer-metropole connections are more or less intensive. And the influence of particular cities on their hinterlands also depends on the existence of other cities, on the economic policies of the relevant state agencies and on global influences.

Where imports are subsidized (or 'dumped') and the provision of hinterlands with local produce is affected by negative government policies, opportunities for hinterland farmers will be thwarted. However, the provisioning with agricultural produce around many African metropolises is largely an autonomous process, despite government rules, regulations and negative practices. The map shows many metropolises with their own, undisputed hinterlands but in Morocco, Egypt, Sierra Leone-Liberia, the Kinshasa-Brazzaville area, South Africa and particularly Nigeria, many metropolitan hinterlands overlap (and compete), offering more choice to expanding agricultural entrepreneurs.



Africa's urbanization

Africa is still very much seen as a 'rural continent', and figures of Sub-Saharan Africa's population distribution indeed show that currently its urbanization level is 'only' 36%. However: Africa experiences a fast growth of its urban population, partly as a result of high population growth figures in these cities, but also because of rural-urban migration. And a lot of Africa's people are quite mobile. Many Africans combine a rural and an urban existence, or regularly shift from living in the rural areas, to small towns and then move on to Africa's booming cities.¹

Degrees of Urbanization in Africa

The African Studies Centre (ASC) published a poster in 2011 to illustrate Africa's population dynamics, showing changes in levels of urbanization between 1960 and 2007: for Africa as a whole from below 20% to the current level that is approaching 50%, or from 65 million in 1960 to 460 million today, i.e. a seven-fold increase in just over fifty years. Within Africa, Congo-Brazzaville, Libya and Tunisia have rates above 60% today and figures for South Africa, Cameroon, Liberia, Algeria and Morocco are also above 50%. Relatively low levels (<20%) can still be found in countries like Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Malawi.

From 'States' to 'Cities'

In geographers' circles, there is growing conviction that the 'era of globalization' has meant a shift of political and economic importance from states to cities, and thus from national governments to municipal governments and their business allies, especially where these have formed what is called an 'urban growth coalition'. National governments have lost (some of) their influence due to the growing importance of global-level institutions and corporate interests but also because of the driving forces in the major metropolises of a country. Scientific, civic and business interest in what is happening in the big metropolises of Africa is warranted!

55 Multi-million African Metropolises: An Inventory

According to the English version of Wikipedia (that uses a German source for the agglomeration figures we have used for our map),² there are currently 55 urban areas in Africa with more than one million inhabitants. So, instead of an Africa of 54 (internationally recognized) states, it is useful to look at an Africa of 55 metropolises. The inventory combines the information about the inhabitants of the municipal area itself (which are sometimes rather rough estimates) and of the so-called agglomerations (which may be even less accurate). Information about the presence of the Netherlands government, taken from the official website of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also been added.³ And the metropolises that are in countries that have been selected as 'focus countries' for Dutch development assistance in Africa are also shown, as long as this funding lasts because a new government might change Dutch 'donor darlings' again. The right-hand column highlights information about the current Dutch-supported 'Agri-Hubs' in the countries of the metropolises.⁴ And finally, those metropolises that combine being in a current focus country for development assistance (and with a Netherlands Embassy) with being in a country with a Dutch-supported Agri-Hub are indicated in **bold**.

The African Studies Centre (ASC)

The ASC in Leiden, founded in 1947, is the only academic institute in The Netherlands devoted entirely to the study of Africa. Its primary aims are to undertake scientific research on Sub-Saharan Africa in the social sciences and to promote a better understanding of African societies. It is an independent institute but maintains close links with Leiden University.

The work of the ASC is not only of importance to other researchers but also to policymakers, journalists, NGOs and multinational companies and organizations.

Research The research programme usually lasts for a period of five years and the projects are multidisciplinary. The research is of an empirical nature and is carried out in cooperation with African colleagues and institutions. The ca. 25 researchers and PhD candidates conduct research in Sub-Saharan Africa on a variety of themes in social sciences.

Library The ASC's Library, Documentation and Information Department has the most extensive and specialized collection of Africa in the Netherlands in the fields of the social sciences, the humanities and law. The library, which is open to the general public, has more than 80,000 books, 1,500 documentaries and feature films from and about Africa, and subscribes to nearly 750 periodicals. African Studies Abstracts Online contains some 10,000 abstracts and journal articles. Web dossiers offer background information about a number of events and themes.

Publications The ASC researchers publish in many different journals and with well-known publishing houses. In addition, the ASC has five publication series:

- Africa Yearbook
- Afrika-Studiecentrum Series
- African Dynamics
- African Studies Collection
- and ASC Infosheets

Seminars The ASC offers a regular seminar programme on Thursday afternoons. The seminars, on a wide range of topics, are given by prominent local and foreign-based Africanists. The seminars are open to the public.

Agglomeration	No. of people in municipal area (in millions)	No. of people in municipal area (in millions)	Dutch government presence*	With Dutch-supported Agri-Hubs ⁵
Cairo	7.8	15.2	Egypt: EA	no
Lagos	7.9	11.8	Nigeria: E	no
Kinshasa	5.5	8.9	DR Congo: EA	yes
Johannesburg	3.9	7.6	S. Africa: E	no
Khartoum	2.9	5.0	Sudan: EA	no
Alexandria	4.1	4.6	Egypt: E	no
Abidjan	4.2	4.4	Côte d'Ivoire: H	no
Casablanca	3.6	4.0	Morocco: E	no
Cape Town	3.5	3.8	S. Africa: C	no
Durban	3.5	3.7	S. Africa: C	no
Accra	3.7	3.6	Ghana: EA+F	no
Nairobi	1.1	3.5	Kenya: EA+F	yes
Mogadishu	2.2	3.5	Somalia: -	no
Kano	2.1	3.4	Nigeria: E	no
Ibadan	1.3	3.4	Nigeria: E	no
Dar es Salam	2.5	3.2	Tanzania: EA	yes
Algiers	2.9	3.2	Algeria: EA	no
Addis Ababa	2.7	3.1	Ethiopia: EA+F	yes
Luanda	1.8	3.1	Angola: EA	no
Dakar	2.9	2.7	Senegal: EA	no
Pretoria	2.3	2.5	S. Africa: EA	no
Tunis	1.0	2.3	Tunisia: EA	no
Harare	1.9	2.3	Zimbabwe: EA	no
Douala	1.5	2.2	Cameroon: -	no
Hargeisa	(1.3)	2.0	Somalia: -	no
Abuja	1.4	(2.0)	Nigeria: EA	no
Kampala	1.3	2.0	Uganda: EA+F	yes
Bamako	1.2	1.9	Mali: EA+F	yes
Maputo	1.1	1.9	Mozambique: EA+F	yes
Rabat	0.6	1.9	Morocco: EA	no
Antananarivo	(1.9)	1.9	Madagascar: H	no
Lusaka	1.1	1.8	Zambia: EA	yes
Yaounde	1.2	1.8	Cameroon: -	no
Ouagadougou	1.5	1.7	Burkina Faso: EA	no
Conakry	1.1	1.7	Guinea: -	no
Kaduna	0.8	1.7	Nigeria: E	no
Kumasi	1.2	1.6	Ghana: E+F	no
Lubumbashi	(1.5)	1.5	DR Congo: E	no
Mbuji-Maji	(1.5)	1.5	DR Congo: E	no
Brazzaville	1.2	1.4	Congo Rep: H	no
Oran	0.6	1.3	Algeria: E	no
Benin	1.3	1.3	Nigeria: E	no
Port Harcourt	0.5	1.2	Nigeria: E	no
Tripoli	0.9	1.2	Libya: EA	no
Freetown	0.9	1.2	Sierra Leone: -	no
Cotonou	0.7	1.2	Benin: EA+F	yes
Vereeniging	0.8	(1.1)	S. Africa: E	no
Fes	1.0	1.1	Morocco: E	no
Maiduguri	0.5	1.1	Nigeria: E	no
Monrovia	1.0	1.1	Liberia: -	no
Port Elizabeth	1.1	1.1	S. Africa: E	no
Huambo	(1.0)	(1.0)	Angola: E	no
Ogmoshobo	1.0	(1.0)	Nigeria: E	no
Zaria	0.4	1.0	Nigeria: E	no
Ndjamena	(0.9)	1.0	Chad: H	no
Bujumbura	0.8	<1	Burundi: EA	yes
Niamey	0.8	<1	Niger: -	yes
Kigali	0.9	<1	Rwanda: EA	yes

¹ Source: <http://data.worldbank.org/topic/urban-development>; retrieved Oct 15 2012. For the Middle East and North Africa the most recent figure is 59%.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_metropolitan_areas_in_Africa; for agglomeration figures, <http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html>

³ Official presence of the Netherlands government: <http://www.minbuza.nl/reizen-en-landen/vertegenwoordiging-van-het-koninkrijk-der-nederlanden-in-het-buitenland>

⁴ We have added three cities with Agri-Hubs but with less than one million inhabitants. <http://www.agri-profocus.nl/>

⁵ All Agri-Hubs are in the metropole, with the exception of the DRC (in Kivu), in Tanzania (in Arusha) and Mali (in Sikasso).

⁶ <http://www.agri-profocus.nl/agri-profocus/mission-vision/>

* EA Netherlands Embassy in the agglomeration
 C Netherlands Consulate General in the city
 H Netherlands Honorary Consul in the city
 E Netherlands Embassy in the country
 F Focus Country for Dutch Development Cooperation (true at time of going to press, October 2012)

Agri-ProFocus

Agri-ProFocus (APF) is a partnership with Dutch roots that promotes farmer entrepreneurship in developing countries. The partnership was founded in 2005 with the aim of rallying together professionals, expertise and resources around a joint interest in farmer entrepreneurship. The Agri-ProFocus partnership members are organisations and companies that gather, train, connect and provide inputs and credit to farmer entrepreneurs and producer organisations. The larger network operates both at a Dutch(-based) level and at a developing country level, the latter in so-called 'Agri-Hubs'. Agri-Hubs are made up of hundreds of local organisations and professionals and are coordinated by a local team. By promoting entrepreneurship and connecting producers with national and international markets, Agri-ProFocus members aim to both open up market potential for business in developing countries, as well as meet with the challenge of sustainably feeding 9 billion people by 2050.⁶

African Metropolises as agrohubs

In classical economic geography, it is an established fact that growing urban populations in developing economies can be an autonomous force for change in a city's hinterland. Writing in the nineteenth century, Johann Heinrich Von Thünen observed that cities tend to have a ring of intensive agriculture (horticulture, milk, eggs and poultry production) around them, followed by a ring of forests producing fuel wood and charcoal, then a ring of staple food production (grain in his German examples) and finally a ring of extensive livestock production (mainly beef). His book (Der Isolierte Staat; 1826-1863, three volumes) is about a time and area far removed from today's Africa. And of course the current era of mass globalization is very different from the close city-hinterland connections in many of German's regions in those years. However the central message should still be taken seriously: growing metropolises do create major opportunities for farmers (including forest and livestock producers) in the hinterlands of city environments. Cities work as magnets, as 'agrohubs', for hinterland produce but also as clusters of innovation, and as centres for acquiring knowledge, advice, credit and material inputs. If cities develop a substantial middle-class population (as ever more African cities currently have), the urban markets for rural produce can also differentiate in various segments, while cities with a varied ethnic composition, like African cities, combine a range of tastes and preferences, offering opportunities for farmers and traders looking for niches.

Metropolitan Food Security

While hunger is mainly a rural affair in Africa where close to half the continent's small farmers and land labourers are 'food insecure', access to affordable food is also a problem in the cities. The expanding supermarkets (either international or local chains) predominantly provide for the urban middle classes and are increasingly doing so. However, the large majority of Africa's urban poor (and food insecure) depend on access to food markets, small shops, their own linkages to contacts in the rural areas and food they produce themselves as 'urban agriculture' and in the peri-urban fringes. The food webs in Africa's metropolises are complex and competition can be fierce, with prices rocketing once in a while and leading to hunger and malnutrition among the urban poor.

The African Studies Centre in Leiden and its agrohubs Research Programme

The African Studies Centre has been undertaking research projects on food and nutrition for a long time and recently conducted extensive research on urban agriculture and rural-urban food linkages. 2012 saw the start of an intensification of research activities, with case studies on cities as agrohubs (partly linked to the Agri-Hubs of Agri-ProFocus) but also dealing with more macro-level issues and Africa-wide comparisons, like those on this poster. We are looking for partners to collaborate with us at the ASC and for funds to engage more young African and Dutch scholars in this fascinating field of study. Are you interested in participating?