Changing Local Government Responses to Migration in South Africa

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Introduction

South Africa’s politics, economy, and society have been shaped by elaborate controls on human mobility and the often subterranean efforts to undermine them. With the country’s first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa’s previously forbidden cities became primary destinations for migrants from around the country, across the continent, and beyond. Population movements—some predictable, some spontaneous; some voluntary, some forced—are now perennial features of South African Cities (South African Cities Network 2004:36; Balbo and Marconi 2005; Bekker 2002; Dorrington 2005). Constitutionally empowered to be a leading force for development, local governments have nevertheless been wary of addressing migration or to see movement as a fundamental driver of development. This reluctance partially stems from a belief among many policy makers (local and national), that immigration and migration are exclusively matters of national policy concern. Others naively hope that heightened human mobility is a temporary outgrowth of the country’s democratic transition and, if ignored, will simply go away. At the very least they want to do nothing to encourage it. In almost all instances, budgeting and planning exercises have largely excluded extended population projections and insights into the relationships among mobility, livelihoods, and community development. Consequently, city leaders continue to plan for a slowly growing and largely stable population. Not only has this meant lost opportunities to promote the welfare of urban and rural communities, but the negative by-products are becoming visible. Without a significant shift in thinking and policy on human mobility, these will become more acute in the decades ahead.

After providing a superficial overview of migration dynamics and challenges in South Africa, this short essay makes five recommendations for improving migration policy and management:

- Reconsider the analytic and bureaucratic divisions between documented and undocumented migrants; between voluntary and forced migrants; and between international and domestic migration. Such divides have produced policy silos with little coordination among agencies charged with law enforcement, status determination, documentation, social assistance, or local development. With South Africa’s patterns of mixed migration, there is a need to develop bureaucratic and planning mechanisms to address human mobility more broadly.
• Analytically respatialise planning and management scenarios. While recognizing national government’s important role, there is a need to enhance the role of local governments—working together and with districts, provinces, and national bodies—in evaluating, designing and implementing an approach to human mobility. As both migration and development patterns vary across space and time, any policy approach that fails to disaggregate migration according to these variables is unlikely to realise its objectives.

• Situate migration and its management within global debates over governance and development. As of yet, few international actors (let alone the South African Government), have applied lessons learned from broader governance approaches to migration. If nothing else, the report suggests that foreign assistance and domestic policy reforms push for ‘migration mainstreaming’ into all aspects of governance. In a country where international and domestic mobility remain demographically and politically important, the success of any development initiative must overtly consider the country’s population dynamics. As part of this process, the government should identify and understand what causes the negative by-products of human mobility—corruption, social exclusion, lack of access to services, labour competition—and begin developing ways to help reduce them rather than rely on the false premise that it can and should control people’s movements.¹

• Fundamentally reconsider how resources are allocated to municipalities. South African fiscal arrangements give municipalities little authority to raise funds to support social and infrastructural investments. As such, the greatest part of municipal and district resources come through allocation from the central treasury based on current population estimates. This is problematic for at least two reasons. First, many of the poorest urban residents are not counted in the national census and thus do not attract funding for municipal authorities (despite often being those in greatest need of state assistance). Second, the current mechanisms for allocating resources do not consider population trajectories. As such, local authorities often lack the resources needed for populations that are likely to arrive in the future or for those temporarily residing within their municipalities. Moreover, current budgeting models rarely support translocal coordination in support of populations who move across municipal or provincial boundaries.

• Any effort to incorporate migration into long-term policy and governance systems will require better data and integration of data into planning processes. At present, there are few skills

¹ For more on this point, see Landau and Wa Kabwe Segatti 2008.
within or out of government for collecting, monitoring, and analysing information on either domestic or international migration. These skills shortages are even more acute at the regional level. Without the ability to describe human mobility and evaluate policies’ current and potential impacts, interventions are likely to fail in ways that help realise many planners’ current fears about human mobility’s effects on prosperity, security, and development.

Data and Approach

In moving beyond the demographic and quantitative fixations characterising much of the migration and development literature, this study embeds demographic trends within broader socio-political and institutional configurations. In doing so, it draws on an ecumenical set of data in illustrating the intersections between human mobility and development in South Africa. This includes considerable participant observation in national, local, and regional migration-related discussions, original survey research, quantitative data analysis, and formal and informal interviews with migrants, service providers, advocates, and local and national government representatives in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and elsewhere. In all instances, I work from the position that social and political understandings of human mobility are as important as actual movements in determining development outcomes. As such, the following essay explicitly focuses on perceptions among officials in addition to empirical evidence about mobility.

For its quantitative components, this paper relies on data provided by the national statistics agency (Stats SA) — particularly the 2001 census and the 2007 community survey—and data collected by colleagues at the Forced Migration Studies Programme (FMSP). (The 2007 community survey generated a nationally representative sample of all South African residents but does not provide all of the spatial and demographic details afforded by the 2001 census.) The first of the FMSP surveys (2006) interviewed 847 respondents in seven central Johannesburg neighbourhoods. Of these, 29.9% (253) were from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); 24% (203) from Mozambique; 22% (186) from Somali; and 22.4% from South Africa (190) (the remaining 1.8% were from other countries mistakenly included in the sample.) The sample was 59.7% male, generally reflecting official estimates of the inner-cities demographic composition (SACN 2006). An earlier iteration of this survey was conducted in 2003 and additional iterations were conducted in Maputo, Lubumbashi, and Nairobi in 2006. The second survey (2009) was conducted in Alexandra township.

2 More information on the 2001 census and the 2007 community survey are available from the Statistics South Africa website (http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/populationstats.asp). The author is grateful to Veronique Gindrey for her contributions to the statistical analysis included in this report and to Aurelia Wa Kabwe Segatti and Graeme Gotz for their insights and thoughts.
just north of Johannesburg and, again, in the inner city. A breakdown of the sample is included in Table One.

Table One: 2009 Survey Sample Breakdown by Place of Living and Migration History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residential Site</th>
<th>Migration History</th>
<th>Sample N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandra</td>
<td>Born in South Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long term residents</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal migrants</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign-born</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1006</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Johannesburg</td>
<td>Born in South Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long term residents</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal migrants</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign-born</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1022</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>2028</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data are by no means representative of South Africa’s ‘migrant stock’ or of the general population. Nonetheless, they provide critical illustrations of trends and points where migration and development intersect. One element almost completely absent from this essay and available data is the impacts of urbanisation and migration on sending communities. While we have collected data on remittances to ‘home’ communities, we know little about individual, household, or municipal levels consequences.

Demographic Overviews

Despite the limited data on migration into, out of, within, and through South Africa, we are nevertheless able to identify distinct spatial dynamics to both international and domestic migration in the country. In previous decades, much of the international migration concentrated in agricultural and mining areas. Similarly, until the late 1980s, urbanisation was strictly regulated although never absolutely controlled (see Posel 1997). Since the early 1990s, both international and domestic migrants are increasingly concentrated in the country’s urban centres (see Figures One and Two and Table Two).¹ In 2001, Statistics South Africa (the national statistics agency) estimated that 57.1% of the population was urbanised. Based on population densities, this number could be recalculated to 68.5% or higher. Accompanying the growth of South Africa’s urban population, the average

¹ These maps were developed by the Forced Migration Studies Programme in collaboration with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
household size has dropped from 4.5 in 1996 to 3.9 in 2001. At current rates of population movements, these trends are likely to continue in the decades ahead.

Figure One: Spatial Distribution of Recent International Migrants

Figure Two: Spatial Distribution of Recent Domestic Migrants

4 Figures derived from Stats SA data.
As the figures and table above suggest, Gauteng Province is at the centre of both international and domestic migration. This should come as little surprise: despite being the smallest of South Africa’s nine provinces (less than 2% of the landmass), it contributes close to 34% of its gross domestic product (close to 10% of the GDP for sub-Saharan Africa). By far the most urbanised population, it is also the most cosmopolitan. In the 2007 Community Survey, 5.6% of the Province’s population born was born outside South Africa, almost double the national average. While international migrants are a significant presence, they are only about 15% of the net migration (i.e., the difference between the arrivals and departures from the province) of 418,000 between October 2001 and February 2007. Even within the Province, non-nationals are concentrated in certain cities (7.9% of Johannesburg is foreign born) and particular neighbourhoods. Whereas inner-city areas like Yeoville, Berea, and Hillbrow now are close to or above 50% foreign-born, the number of non-nationals is negligible elsewhere in the city.

Even if international migration attracts the most political attention and popular opprobrium, domestic mobility is far more significant in numeric terms. Fully explaining the dynamics of inter-community and inter-provincial migration would require another report far longer than this. Suffice it to raise a number of critical points. First, research by the South African Cities Network (2006:16) and others clearly illustrates the spatial dynamics of migration to particular urban centres. In Metsweding, a smaller municipality in Gauteng Province, more than 10% of the total population has recently moved there. In Durban, the figure is less than 1%. And while discussions of urbanisation typically focus on primary cities, the fastest growing parts of Gauteng are not Johannesburg and Pretoria but rather smaller communities beyond the ‘urban edge’ (See Table Three). The most

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notable and controversial effect of this growth has been the expansion of poorly serviced informal settlements (i.e., shantytowns) ringing more established and well-serviced formal settlements.

Table Three: Migration Figures for Selected Municipalities 2001-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>In-Migration as Percentage of Total Population (2006)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metsweding (Gauteng)</td>
<td>10.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overberg (KwaZulu-Natal)</td>
<td>8.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tshwane (Pretoria)</td>
<td>7.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Coast (Western Cape)</td>
<td>6.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekurhuleni (Johannesburg Suburb)</td>
<td>5.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Rand (Johannesburg Suburb)</td>
<td>5.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johannesburg (Gauteng)</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Town (Western Cape)</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eThekwini (KwaZulu-Natal)</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson Mandela (Eastern Cape)</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data produced by Statistics South Africa. Table reproduced from South African Cities Network 2006 p. 2.18

As a result of these internal movements, out migration is also significantly shifting population profiles of a number of the country’s smaller and less prosperous communities. For example, Chris Hani municipality in the Eastern Cape has lost more than 8.5% of its population over the past decade (Cities Network 2006:18). Many of those who left are young men heading for the Western Cape (Dorrington 2005). Consequently, there are significant distortions in population pyramids in both sending and receiving communities (see Collinson, et al, 2006).

In addition to sheer numbers, shifts within and among Provinces are resulting in significant changes in skills level and social composition. In the Western Cape, the arrival of people from the Eastern Cape, traditionally an ANC stronghold, is not only transforming the Province’s racial composition, but also threatens the viability of the Province’s ruling party, the Democratic Alliance. In Gauteng, the enormous diversity fostered by migration has proven to be a politically exploitable resource in the past, particularly during the violence preceding the 1994 general elections and again in the May 2008 ‘xenophobic’ attacks (which targeted both foreign and South African migrants). As South African politics again become more competitive, there are hints that ethnicity may re-emerge as a dangerous political divide.

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6 The municipalities represented in these tables were selected by the South African Cities Network, the organisation that originally published these data, to illustrate national trends. They are not necessarily representative of all South African cities.
South Africa is also seeing a great diversification in its population’s migration trajectories. Whereas Apartheid-era South African migration policy promoted permanent White immigration and temporary Black migration, the post-apartheid period is characterised by a mix of circular, permanent, and transit migration. Indeed, such impermanence is encouraged by the current policy frameworks, the difficulties migrants have in accessing secure accommodation, and the rapid rate of deportations.

As with many of the characteristics of migration, these trends are again most visible in Gauteng Province. For reasons of location, infrastructure, intention and experience, the Province is as much a place of transit as destination. This transit takes multiple forms. The first is the continuation of long-standing patterns of circular migration from rural South Africa and elsewhere in the region, albeit now focused more around townships and urban centres. The second form of transit rests with traders and refugees who come to Gauteng seeking opportunities for profit or temporary protection. While often remaining in cities for extended periods, their lives and interactions are typically conditioned by their interest in onward movement. The third type of transit migration is driven by those who see the country’s cities as a stepping-stone or trampoline. The Province’s wealth often attracts those who expect to accumulate the money needed for onward journeys. Many come hoping for contacts and social networks that will facilitate movement to other cities or countries. Still others hope to capitalise on the country’s corrupt immigration regime that allows almost anyone with money to secure South African citizenship and documentation. With these documents in hand, travel to Europe and elsewhere becomes far easier.

The tendency towards transit is particularly visible in smaller towns where people first come after leaving ‘rural’ or formal homeland areas. Such smaller towns are often unable to retain more ambitious people who may quickly move on to larger cities or to smaller towns on the edge of larger cities. Coupled with these moves towards the larger urban centres are frequent returns to sending areas for a variety of reasons discussed below.

Some of these trends are illustrated by FMSP research: in the 2006 Wits University survey in Johannesburg, 59% of migrants considered Johannesburg as their final destination. This proportion is higher for Mozambicans (78%) and for the internal migrants (84%). In many regards, the migrants born in Mozambique have the same migratory behaviour as the internal migrants in South Africa.

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7 The South African situation is such that there are few areas that are ‘rural’ in the sense of supporting petty agriculture. Indeed, some have argued that if one looks at population densities alone, there are effectively no rural areas in the country.
When the Mozambicans had considered other destinations, it was essentially Swaziland or a European country. South Africans who migrated to Johannesburg also regularly considered other destinations in South Africa and many people had, in fact, lived elsewhere before coming to Johannesburg. Table Four captures some of these dynamics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of birth (%)</th>
<th>DRC</th>
<th>Somalia</th>
<th>Mozambique</th>
<th>South Africa outside Johannesburg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of origin</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third country</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Wits University, African Cities Survey 2006

Linked to these trajectories and other factors, people regularly move within South Africa as well as into and out of it. According to the 2007 Community Survey, 18% of Gauteng’s inhabitants had moved within the Province since 2001. According to FMSP data for the inner city of Johannesburg, the South African born population has, on average, moved twice since coming to the city. In most instances that means moving twice within ten years. For foreigners, who have typically lived in the city for shorter periods, the average number of moves is slightly above three times.

There is no easy way to summarise population dynamics apart from saying that (a) we know too little about them and (b) that there is no single pattern of movement. As elsewhere in the world, South African movements into and through cities are driven by the desire for passage, profit, and protection. These dynamics are then shaped by the country’s relatively unique socio-spatial history that has left populations tightly clustered in economically unviable ‘rural’ locales and peri-urban townships. As the following section suggests, the consequences of these dynamics are being shaped (or at least influenced) by current policy frameworks and more or less ineffective responses from national and local authorities.

**Policy Frameworks and Policy Responses**

Local government is one of three spheres of government defined by the South African Constitution. As currently conceived—the relationships between the governmental spheres is currently under review—South Africa is somewhere between a centralised and a federal state. Local government’s

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8 The introductory paragraphs of this section draw heavily from Götz and Landau 2004 and Götz 2004.
relatively independent status is protected by the Constitution itself but, in practice, is severely curtailed by financial and human resource constraints and the domination of local government by the highly centralised African National Congress. Nonetheless, the Constitution provides clear definitions of municipalities’ roles and responsibilities including legislative and executive authority over a number of matters. By and large, municipalities are required to concentrate on their own service responsibilities in areas such as: water and sanitation; waste removal; fire fighting services; local tourism; municipal planning; municipal public transport; cemeteries, cleansing; control of public nuisances; municipal parks and recreation; municipal roads; building regulation; sports facilities; local amenities; street trading; street lighting; traffic and parking; electricity and gas reticulation; etc. Many local government competencies relate to services that are vital for day-to-day survival, social reproduction and mobility.

As important as local government is in shaping mobility’s developmental impacts, many of the social and economic concerns associated with movement are not explicitly within local government’s mandate. The primary needs of migrants – shelter, access to health care, access to education, safety and security and proper treatment in detention, access to economic opportunities, administrative justice – are largely the responsibility of national or provincial governments. That said, local municipalities do, under Section 153(a) of the Constitution, have a responsibility to, ‘structure and manage its administration and budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community, and to promote the social and economic development of the community’. Section 152(1) further defines this ‘developmental duty’ by saying that local government has various objects or purposes. These include ‘to promote social and economic development’, ‘to promote a safe and healthy environment’, and other responsibilities that clearly suggest some responsibility towards human mobility. This comes through more clearly in the (non-binding) White Paper on Local Government of 1998 which argues that the challenge for local government is not ‘how to run a set of services’, but how to ‘transform and manage settlements’ that are amongst the most distorted and also the most complex and dynamic in the world. The White Paper proposed that this bigger challenge can only be grasped if municipalities think of themselves as ‘developmental local government.’ In this regard, municipal authorities have a certain— but ill-defined— role in addressing human mobility.

In this context, some within local government have seen increasing migration and diversity as a hugely positive sign of South African cities’ emergence as trading and cultural centres. In response, city planners in both Johannesburg and Cape Town have begun outlining strategies for recruiting and
incorporating highly skilled migrants and refugees into the city’s socio-economic networks.\textsuperscript{9} However, it is also evident that many of the cities’ leaders and citizens feel overwhelmed – if not threatened – by migration, both international and domestic. In other places, the out-migration of the cities’ skilled and affluent is raising the spectre of economic decline and an ever-expanding underclass (SACN 2006). For many in and out of government, migration is conceptually tied to the expansion of drug syndicates, prostitution, and human trafficking, unemployment, crime, and a range of other social and economic ills. Apart from a few exceptional cases, elected officials sense that urbanisation and international migration raise the spectre of economic and political fragmentation and urban degeneration (see Beal, \textit{et al}, 2003).

Most of South Africa’s municipalities now accept that new arrivals are part of their populations and that they will have to address migration. Part of the shift in policy comes from the slow recognition among \textit{some} officials in local government that without apartheid-style measures to control movements—measures that for reasons of intention and incapacity never achieved 100\% effectiveness—cities can do little to alter regional migration dynamics (Kok and Collinson 2006; Johannesburg Strategic Development Strategy 2006). In the words of one Johannesburg city councillor, ‘as much as we might not want them here, we can not simply wish these people away’ (Personal Communication, 13 July 2005). FMSP research reveals similar perspectives among planners and planning documents in Cape Town and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{10}

However, this recognition comes with considerable trepidation and most municipalities (both urban and rural) have thus far failed to develop empirically informed and proactive policy responses to human mobility. Although there are slow changes, many officials continue to react to the presence of new arrivals by implicitly denying their presence, excluding them from developmental plans, or allowing various forms of official and non-official discrimination. In both Cape Town and Johannesburg, internal and domestic migrants continue to be seen largely as a drain on public resources (see Provincial Government of Western Cape 2002) rather than as potential resources or, more neutrally, as the people government is dedicated to serve. Even those wishing to more proactively absorb new, often poor and vulnerable populations, face considerable challenges in

\textsuperscript{9} In 2005, Cape Town conducted a skills audit of its refugee population so as to better develop policies to capitalise on their presence in the city. Johannesburg has yet to follow suit but has recently officially recognised the potential contributions migrants make to the city.

\textsuperscript{10} Johannesburg metropolitan government has slowly begun to consider migrants as a vulnerable group although it is unclear whether any efforts to include migrants in local decision-making priorities are being made.
determining how to do so. I will speak about these obstacles momentarily. Before doing so, I wish to briefly outline a number of the development

The Developmental Consequences of Human Mobility

There is little systematic, nationally representative data that outlines migration’s spatialised developmental effects. However, a review of data from the FMSP’s Johannesburg-based work points to a number of critical – and largely negative—effects that have resulted from poor planning, lack of resources, and overt discrimination. These are most evident in the area of housing (or human settlements in the current official lexicon), employment, and access to social services.

The remainder of this section briefly outlines some of the aforementioned challenges for the newly urbanised. As noted in this paper’s methodological introduction, these data do not tell us the effects of migration on sending communities. Some have argued that these effects are largely negative in that they destroy family structures and can lead to a variety of negative social by-products. There may be some truth to such assessments although one suspects that the findings are as much a result of a socially conservative impulse as a reaction to empirical data. What we do know is that migrant labour in South Africa continues to be a critical livelihood support for many South African households. In the 2006 Johannesburg survey, close to half (47.9%) of the South Africans interviewed reported regularly sending money to someone outside of Johannesburg, most commonly to parents (60.7%) or other close relatives. Of those sending resources, 59.3% say they send on a monthly basis with another 22% reporting sending money home three to four times a year. The amount of resources sent from the townships and peri-urban settlements is probably considerably less given that those living in the inner city are relatively prosperous. Even so, indications are that it remains a central livelihood strategy (Vearey, et al, 2008). Indeed, when families invest in sending someone to a city for education or to look for a work, the migrant is likely to remain a critical resource for households in non-urban areas. While rural to urban transfers are not a primary source of support as they are elsewhere on the continent, urban to urban transfers appear to be of growing importance (Vearey, et al, 2008).

The 2009 FMSP study in Alexandra Township and the inner city identifies a number of forms of vulnerability associated with residents in those areas. All of these areas are primary destinations for people arriving from outside the city although the types of people who settle in the two areas are starkly different. Given the expense of housing in the inner-city, the migrants who end up there tend to be from stronger educational backgrounds and have some prior urban experience. The main
forms of vulnerability include risks of unemployment, poor access to services and capital, and insecurity due collective violence, criminality, and harassment by state representatives. These are experienced differently from one area to another, as shown by significant differences between Alexandra and the Inner City and among different population groups (in this case among the long term South African residents, internal migrants and the foreign-born). However, a number of critical factors affect populations across nationality and locale. These include, *inter alia*, i) poor education and health status that translates into low income earning potential; ii) inadequate documentation that hinders access to employment and services, iii) discrimination and victimisation linked to place of birth, iv) sex, with women being more vulnerable than men, and v) place of residence: while Alexandra are more exposed to risks of unemployment and public violence, there is considerable variation even within Alexandra.

There are at least three areas that warrant further exploration:

**Accommodation**

Providing access to dignified and healthy housing is a key policy challenge for South Africa in relation to all its residents. However, South Africa’s housing policy has severely disadvantaged both non-citizens (who are comprehensively excluded from subsidized housing programmes for low-income groups) and South African migrants. Although there are mechanism such as the National Housing Subsidy Scheme, the National Housing Programme for the Upgrading of Informal Settlements, the Emergency Housing Programme and subsidised rental in Council properties, these provisions have proved patently unable to support recent arrivals (see Greenburg and Polzer 2008).

Perhaps the greatest challenge to migrants accessing housing is the way in which government has conceptualised public housing provision. For a variety of reasons too complex to describe here, South Africa settled on a public housing model that, in most cases, intends to provide free standing housing to those falling below certain income levels. The ownership of these houses is then transferred so they can use it as an asset to secure loans or ‘trade-up’ into a better housing situation. Such an approach has fallen short for a number of reasons. Although the government has (by its own estimation) provided well over a million housing units in the past decade, these do not


come close to meeting the demand. Part of the problem has been that these houses have been built on available land near people’s current residences. This (a) excludes people who wish to leave economically unproductive areas, instead reinforcing apartheid-era spatial divisions; and (b) means that when new houses are built in urban areas, they are often far from where people could potentially work. Indeed, as a fixed asset they do not allow the kind of flexibility often required for people who change jobs frequently. Moreover, while people technically own the property, there is a formal prohibition on selling it for five years after it has been received. As such, the government has effectively killed the entry level housing market and disabled the poor’s ability to ‘trade-up’.

Beyond the technicalities described above, the types of housing provided are ill-suited to a newly urbanised population. In most instances they are available only to married couples or to single people (usually women) with children. Given that many of the migrants reaching cities are neither married nor actively caring for children, they have been essentially excluded from this benefit. Moreover, as many of the newly urbanised do not see the city as a final destination, the last thing they want is to invest their resources in a permanent home. However, given the stigma associated with ‘hostels’ (large structures intended to occupy migrant labour), the government has been reluctant to consider large-scale temporary or transitional housing options.

Due to these exclusions and a general shortage of public housing, FMSP research in urban areas suggests that 70% of urban migrants live in privately rented inner-city flats, of which 36% are main tenants and 64% are in sub-tenancy arrangements (Greenburg and Polzer 2008; also Peberdy and Majodina 2000). Housing insecurity is most strikingly illustrated by migrants’ experience of overcrowding through sub-tenancy. Of survey respondents, 40% stated this as their main housing concern. Overcrowding impacts negatively on both physical and mental health, on the ability to build a sustainable livelihood, and on child development. Since overcrowding also contributes to the degeneration of buildings and urban infrastructure, it is in the interest of metropolitan councils to reduce housing insecurity. Using data collected during the FMSP’s 2009 survey, Table Five provides a breakdown of the type of where people live.
Table Five: Housing conditions by place of living and migration history

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of living and migration history</th>
<th>Alexandra</th>
<th>Johannesburg inner-city</th>
<th>Country of birth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long term residents</td>
<td>Internal migrants</td>
<td>Foreign-born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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It also important to keep in mind that South African cities rarely provide a housing ‘ladder’. As such, even those who are able to establish a toe-hold in the city can rarely trade up. Without well paid and regularly jobs, it is almost impossible to get the housing credit needed to span the significant price gap between an entry level or government-provided dwelling and a fully serviced house or flat.

Markets and Financial Services

Ready access to informal and formal markets for exchanging goods and services is critical to successful urban economies. Unfortunately, migrants who have recently arrived in South African cities are often systematically excluded from employment and income generating opportunities through both formal and informal mechanisms. Foreign citizens without the right to work—but with the skills and a willingness to do so—often accept positions where they are paid below the minimum wage or work in undignified conditions. Even those with employment rights report being turned away by employers who do not recognise their papers or their professional qualifications. Without money to have their qualifications recognised by the South African Qualifications Agency (SAQA), they have little choice but to seek other ways to generate income. A recent court decision now allows undocumented migrants to seek recourse for labour abuses through the Labour Court and other arbitration mechanisms. However, it is unclear whether this will have any substantive impact on improving labour conditions.
Despite the obstacles facing international migrants, South African migrants often face much greater obstacles in finding employment. Those coming from poor rural areas are particularly ill-equipped to participate in the urban labour market. As a consequence, newly arrived migrants tend to be among the poorest and least employed. While they may be able to rely on social grants or other forms of social protection, they often struggle to earn the income needed to move out of abject poverty (see Cross, et al, 2005). They also face a series of obstacles related to informal trading that effectively blocks people trying to enter in the lower end of the business sector. These include by-laws that require business licenses or prohibit the kind of trades available to the poor. Although poorly understood, there also appear to be severe social sanctions on newcomers establishing businesses in townships or peri-urban settlements. With significant numbers of South Africans likely to remain ‘structurally unemployed’—unlikely to find formal jobs in their lifetimes—having little access to these sort of small business options can be economically devastating.

The banking sector has done little to assist new migrants in gaining a foothold in the city or to facilitate resource transfers to sites outside the city. Foreigners are typically unable to access even the most rudimentary banking services (see Jacobsen and Bailey 2004). Although South Africans are typically able to open bank accounts, absurdly high bank charges exclude many people from full service banking. As such, only about half of the country’s citizenry has a bank account. Without access to banks and ATMs, cash transfers to people living elsewhere become a significant challenge. For those without access to banks, wire-transfer services and informal moneychangers are collecting the considerable profits from such transactions. Perhaps most importantly, the poor are effectively unable to access the kind of credit needed to either start a business or weather financial shocks. Here too we see the poor being exploited by informal money lenders. At a more immediate level, the inability of people to store cash in a secure location means that they become appealing targets for the criminally inclined.

Social Services

A cocktail of undercapacity, inadequate documentation, poor record keeping, and outright discrimination, prevents many migrants—nonnationals and South Africans—from accessing critical social services. This is most visible in terms of accessing health care. The inability or unwillingness of many hospital staff members to distinguish between different classes of migrants (coupled with xenophobia) often means that migrants, including refugees, are denied access to basic and emergency health services or are charged inappropriate fees. Many non-nationals report not being able to access Anti-Retroviral Treatment, for example, because they do not have green, bar-coded ID
documents. Non-nationals may not only be refused services outright, but foreigners report being made to wait longer than South Africans before being seen and are subject to other forms of discrimination. While waiting, one refugee overheard nurses talking about ‘foreigners taking government money and having too many babies,’ and another reports a hospital staff member describing the hospital as ‘infested’ with foreigners. There are also accounts indicating that non-nationals are often denied full courses of prescribed medicines (see Nkosi 2004; Pursell 2005).

While one might expect foreigners to face difficulty in accessing health care, there are also significant challenges for newly urbanised South Africans. Many people struggle to access adequate care in rural or sending areas are replicated in urban centres. While urban residents are often better to access emergency care, regular, primary care – including HIV testing and anti-retroviral therapy—remains elusive. Some small part of this has to do with individual’s health seeking behaviour: people from rural areas may mistrust the kind of ‘western’ medicine available in the cities. As Vearey, et al, (2008) demonstrate, there are also other significant problems with the availability of health services and medicines in the informal settlements and communities that absorb new migrants. If people are working, they may simply not have the time to travel to more distant clinics. Although the South African Government is now working to improve its record systems, many urban migrants have had to return to clinics in their ‘home’ communities because that is where there records are kept. Even if it were possible to move records to an urban clinic, many migrants’ transience necessitates a system that allows people to access health care at multiple points.

**Challenges in Addressing Migration and Urbanisation**

Recognising the importance of human mobility to human and economic development does not necessarily mean that officials have the information or tools to do this effectively. Perhaps the most fundamental challenge to local governments charged with addressing migration and other development challenges is how little local governments know about the people living in their cities. Whereas national governments have the relative luxury of developing generalised policy frameworks, local governments and service providers are responsible for more focused and context specific interventions. In almost no instances are municipalities able to draw on a nuanced and dynamic understanding of their constituencies. This is generally true regarding the urban poor and all the more so with geographically mobile people. Efforts to map ‘poverty pockets’ (Cross, et al, 2005) and review both national and localised migration data (Dorrington 2005; Bekker 2002; Kok and Collinson 2006; SACN 2006; Landau and Gindrey 2008) represent some of the first concerted effort to understand South Africa’s urban population dynamics. However, many of these studies are based
on admittedly incomplete census data—particularly inaccurate regarding foreign-born populations—and are often purely descriptive. While the Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Authorities (formerly the Department of Provincial and Local Government) now recognises that there is a need for improving cross-border and multi-nodal planning—including a greater consideration of population mobility—planners are effectively unable to understand the ‘functional economic geography of the city and its region [and] how the different components relate to each other’ (SACN 2006: Section 2-7). In this context, local planners continue to be influenced by stereotypes and misreading or incomplete readings of data.

The inability to effectively understand and predict urban populations poses significant risks to local governments’ ability to meet their obligations and developmental objectives. Perhaps most obviously, the invisibility of large segments of the urban population can result in much greater demand for services than predicted, reducing service quality and outstripping budgetary allocations. In many instances, these are hidden costs—to public and private infrastructure, water, and other services that are not accessed individually. The degradation to building stock due to high-population densities—a consequence of new migrants minimizing costs while maximizing centrality—also has long-term cost implications for cities that collect taxes on the bases of building values. Higher populations do not, however, necessarily result in higher costs to local government in receiving areas. Because many of South Africa’s internal migrants are young men, they may remain relatively healthy, autonomous, and productive in urban areas—and hence levy few costs. Moreover, while they may not invest in property, much of their consumption—of food and consumer goods—is in urban areas. In such instance, sending communities may lose the benefits of their labour while being saddled with the costs of educating their children and providing for them in their old age. Many of these costs are paid centrally or via the provinces, but others are the responsibility of local government.

While both sending and receiving communities are influenced by the significant costs and benefits associated with migration, population dynamics are rarely figured into the distribution of national resources by the South African Treasury. Since the promulgation of the new constitution in 1996, the Treasury has distributed money to the Provinces (and subsequently to the Metros) based almost exclusively on current population estimates. Such practices are problematic for at least three reasons. First, the population estimates often significantly misrepresent where people actually live. Someone may own a house and vote in a rural community but live elsewhere for eleven months of the year (Department of Housing 2006). Secondly, peoples’ presence in a particular locality is not
necessarily a good predictor of their costs to local or provincial government. Third, infrastructure and social service planning requires long-term investments based on predictions of population in five to fifteen years time. Without reliable estimates, cities are unable to prepare for their population’s future needs. In late September 2006, the South African Fiscal Commission convened a seminar to try to come to grips with these issues in order to better advise the treasury on resource distribution. In 2008, the Treasury again met—with World Bank support—to discuss resource allocation. However, planning continues to be based on current rather than projected population distributions and all but ignores undocumented migrants. Perhaps most worrying is that many planners’ remain unaware of such an approach’s frailty in a country with such high rates of mobility. This is likely to become particularly problematic as South Africa begins implementing its national spatial development framework.\textsuperscript{14}

**The lack of coordination among government departments** further exaggerates the partial and often ill-informed responses to human mobility. In discussions with planners in both Johannesburg and Cape Town, they repeatedly expressed frustration regarding their efforts to foster collaboration within local government departments and, more importantly, between local government and South Africa’s other two governmental ‘spheres’ (Provincial and National). However, due to migration’s spatial dynamics, effectively responding to human mobility is not something that any single governmental body or sphere can singly address as it requires co-ordination and planning that transcends the boundaries of metropolitan areas and encompasses a wider area connected by commuter flows, economic linkages and shared facilities.

The paucity of collaboration is visible in a variety of potentially critical areas. Perhaps most obviously, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) has been either reluctant or unable to share its data with city planners. These not only include the number of foreigners legally entering the country, but registered moves, deaths, and births. The most probable cause is lack of capacity within the DHA, although there is undoubtedly also a general reluctance to freely share information. It is, of course, not only the DHA that has shown a reluctance to work with local government, but the lack of coordination between DHA and local government is probably the most significant gap.

We must also recognise that were city planners keen to promote the benefits of migration and had the knowledge and support to do so, they are still left with a population that may not identify with the cities in which they live. As suggested earlier, many who come to the city do not expect to stay

there for long. According to Statistics South Africa, ‘the temporary nature of rural-to-urban migration in South Africa may add insight into the persistence of overcrowding and poor living conditions in urban townships. Migrants may employ a calculated strategy to maximise the benefits to their household of origin, rather than for their own benefit or the benefit of residential units in the urban setting’ (in Johannesburg Development Strategy 2006: 28). Critically, journeys home or onwards often remain practically elusive for reasons of money, safety, or social status. This leaves large sections of the population working in the city, but not wishing to take root or invest in it. We also see evidence of this extra-local orientation in the levels of remittances being sent out of the city to both rural communities and other countries.

Although it is almost impossible to quantify the consequences of a city filled with those who identify with sites elsewhere, hints appear in the type of social and material investments people are willing to make in the city, including the type of housing or services for which they are willing to pay. It also raises important governance challenges: if people do not see their future in their existing neighbourhood or urban community, they are less likely to become politically engaged or to voice their opinions about what must be done. Without this feedback, government planning is unlikely to succeed. The cities’ fragmentation and fluidity also raise concerns around the kind of social capital needed to promote small business, offer a social safety net, and combat crime and violence.

In considering the challenges facing local government and the possibility for positive policy reform, we must note that the current policy climate is not conducive to developing pro-migrant responses. As suggested elsewhere, the South African Department of Home Affairs has shown little ability in developing and implementing sound and effective immigration policy. Elsewhere in government, there has been little planning or consideration of human mobility and there appears to be a growing sense that migration remains a social dysfunction that should be countered wherever possible. The current administration’s pro-rural agenda appears to be as much about providing basic services for the poor—and maintaining a rural political constituency—as about halting movement to the country’s towns and cities. As such, there is little reason to believe that South Africa will independently shift its approach to one that accepts human mobility as a natural and potentially productive part of the development process.

Lastly, we must recognise that public policy and government interventions are often only loosely connected with substantive change in citizens’ lives. As a result of its history of struggle and resistance, South African cities are effectively governed by a blend of informal and formal authority
structures often linked to political parties or other more localised political entities. Activated at different levels at different times, these structures determine—albeit inconsistently—the right to live in the city, the potential success of formal institutional reform, and the economic and physical security of those living in a cluster of shacks or a given street. This system of heterogeneous rule is enabled by the lack of trusted, legitimate central leadership. In its absence, self-appointed structures almost completely appropriated the authority constitutionally mandated to local government structures, operating as an ‘untouchable’ parallel leadership in collaboration with the police and elected leaders or against them (see Misago, et al, 2009; Landau and Monson 2008; Palmary, et al, 2003).

In many instances, community leadership is an attractive alternative for the largely unemployed residents of the informal settlements. It is a form of paid employment or an income-generating activity where supposedly voluntary leaders often charge for services, levy protection fees, and sell or let land and buildings, and take bribes in exchange for solving problems or influencing tender processes. The profitability of community leadership positions has attracted considerable infighting and competition for power and legitimacy among different groups present in affected areas. Indeed, street committees, Community Policing Forums (CPFs) and South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO) in most areas report involvement in solving all sorts of problems community members bring to them. For example, In Madelakufa II (a part of Alexandra Township in Johannesburg) respondents report that the CPF, whose mandate is – according to the local CPF leaders – ‘exclusively fighting crime’, also involves itself in solving socio-economic and service delivery issues. In Du Noon, in the Western Cape, the local SANCO, which the other local leaders call a ‘family business’, constantly battles the ward council when negotiating development projects with donors. Any reform initiative, whatever the goal, must negotiate the varied and often difficult terrain.¹⁵

**Recommendation for Reform and Support**

There is little definite or conclusive to say about migration and development in South Africa other than the dynamics are complex, highly spatialised, and prone to rapid shifts in both nature and effects. In such a context, a document like this can only raise issues that will—or should—shape population and political dynamics and responses to them. To that end, there is a need to rethink three divisions: between documented and undocumented migrants; between voluntary and forced

¹⁵ For more on the influence of these local authorities on migration and other matters, see Misago, et al, 2009 and Kynoch 2005.
migrants; and between international and domestic migration. As elsewhere in the world, these are analytical categories that are closely tied with specific legislations and implementing bodies. This has tended to produce policy silos with little coordination among agencies charged with law enforcement, status determination, documentation, social assistance, or local development. In almost no instances do such firm distinctions make logical sense. This is all the more so in South Africa where there are mixed migration flows and few bureaucratic mechanisms to distinguish among the various migrant categories. If there is to be substantive and effective reform in any one of these areas – asylum, migration, border management, or urban development – all must be considered together as part of a national framework to address human mobility. As Swaziland, Lesotho, and parts of Zimbabwe are effectively part of South Africa as far as migrant systems are concerns, these discussions must explicitly consider regional dimensions.

In January 2009, Gauteng Province’s Department of Local Government convened a special seminar on ‘migration mainstreaming’ that seeks to address just these concerns. While innovative and the first such initiative for the country’s most migrant rich province, many of the proposed measures rely on highly sophisticated collection, dissemination, and use of statistics that are yet unavailable. A more immediately feasible proposal includes regular coordination meetings that would bring together senior officials from across local government to review broad migration trends, identify information paucities, and consider potential mechanisms for incorporating migration into their annual and long-term plans.

There is also a need to introduce a spatial component in considering future policy directions. Perhaps more than many policy areas, national governments are automatically assigned comprehensive responsibility for matters affecting immigration, emigration, and broader urban and rural development frameworks. While national government has an important role, there is a need to enhance the role of local authorities in such planning initiatives. As migration’s most immediate effects are felt locally in both sending and receiving communities, municipalities must be involved to ensure that these effects are developmentally positive. Moreover, because migration involves at least two distinct geographic locales, the developmental effects are, by definition, multi-sited. As such, both analysis and policy debates must work towards a multi-sited approach. What we must now begin is a new spatial analysis of migration that breaks from a long-standing epistemological nationalism. Any discussion of migration and development should hereafter consider local, sub-national, national, and – indeed – regional impacts and policy options.
There are also likely to be benefits from situating global debates over migration within broader discussions over governance and development. With a move away from singularly prescriptive approach to governance, the UNDP’s 1997 Human Development concept, the European Commission’s 2006 Strategic Paper on Governance, and even the World Bank Group’s *Engagement on Governance and Anti-Corruption (GAC)* suggest the need to develop policies based on a country’s or municipalities’ specificities. This suggests the need for migration policy and approaches that considers the region’s (and the country’s) population dynamics, economic needs, and institutional capacities and do not borrow uncritically from elsewhere in the world. If nothing else, this report suggests that foreign assistance and domestic policy reforms push for ‘migration mainstreaming’ into all aspects of governance. In a country where international and domestic mobility remains so demographically and politically important, the success of any development initiative must overtly consider the country’s population dynamics. As part of this process, the government should identify and understand the root causes of the negative by-products of human mobility—corruption, human rights abuses, labour competition—and begin developing ways to help reduce them rather than rely on the fantasy that it should and can totally control mobility itself.

In terms of more concrete and immediate interventions, donor and local support could usefully be dedicated to the following concerns:

- **Finding ways of building a ‘housing ladder’ and housing types that are appropriate to mobile populations.** This will enable housing policy to serve as a gateway to the city – allowing those who wish to transit to do so without extraordinary investment and to allow those who wish to stay to gradually improve their housing situation.

- **Shifting time frames for service delivery analysis and planning.** Local authorities are often under pressure to provide quick fixes to their population’s acute needs. While such needs can not be ignored, such an approach all but guarantees (a) that the needs of future residents will not be considered or planned for; and (b) that local authorities will continue to feel threatened by the continued arrival and transit of people through their communities.

- **Facilitate debates around the nature of citizenship, social investment, and participatory politics in areas with mobile or transient populations.** Current community engagement tools often exclude those who are new arrivals or do not see their futures tied to the city. This can only result in more planning and social fragmentation. There is, therefore, a need to rethink how to engage with such populations and to promote social commitment to their
residential communities without denying their aspirations for onward (or return) movement and responsibilities to support those living elsewhere.

- **Develop service delivery mechanisms that consider mobile populations.** As discussed above, the inability of people to access health care records in multiple sites is a fundamental obstacle to accessing health care. Similarly, accessing education, housing, and other services and grants is often difficult for those who move. A review of how records are managed could help address these concerns.

- **Reconsider budgeting and planning frameworks.** In order to encourage planning for mobile population, both sending and receiving communities need to be supported in seeking to address the needs of migrants and their families. This will require (a) allocating resources in ways that consider population trajectories and (b) developing mechanism that can coordinate services in areas where people commute or move across municipal boundaries.

- **Incorporate smaller towns and sending communities in discussions around mobility and development.** To date, it is the country’s largest communities have begun recognising that mobility is affecting their development trajectories. As noted, these are not the only communities affected by migration. As such, any approach to understanding migration and local governance must also consider peri-urban and small towns.

Lastly, any effort to incorporate migration into long-term policy and governance process will require better data and integration of data into planning processes. **Enhanced data collection must not only focus on the number of people moving, but on people’s aspirations and the formal and informal obstacles the face, resources they have available, and strategies they adopt.** This will become particularly important as South Africa actively implements its spatial development model. As this essay illustrates, migrants’ presence and responses to outsiders may be driven by global processes but must be understood within specific, highly localized contexts. While it is useful to develop aggregated trends, reactions and attitudes may be shaped by the particular racial, economic, and political history of a single neighbourhood. All this will require heightening capacity for statistical, institutional, and social analyses. While this is critical at the national level, all spheres of government should be encouraged to collaborate and develop the capacity for data collection and analysis at all levels. Lastly, mechanisms should be created to ensure that these analyses—if they eventually become available—are fed into decision-making processes. Doing otherwise will ensure policy failure and may help realize many planners’ current fears about the effects of human mobility on prosperity, security, and development.
References


