

International Institute of Social Studies

# DEVISSUES

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A stylized map of Africa is the central focus, rendered in a light grey, textured style. The map is overlaid with a complex network of winding, multi-lane roads filled with small, colorful cars. Several modern skyscrapers and green trees are scattered across the map, particularly in the northern and southern regions. The background is a vibrant yellow with a subtle, grainy texture. A large red curved shape is in the top-left corner.

**Opportunities  
and pitfalls**

## **Urbanization in Africa**

# From the **Editorial Board**

## **Rural-urban transformations**

The world is becoming steadily more urban. In 2006, the world's urban population surpassed its rural population, and the African continent is emerging as a focal point in this transformation. While Africa continues to evoke wild spaces in the popular imagination, the demographic and socioeconomic reality is that African cities are experiencing explosive growth rates. Lagos, Nairobi and Kinshasa, for example, have burgeoned into mega-urban centres in just a few decades and have done so at rates paralleling or exceeding those of their Asian counterpart cities. This rapid urbanization presents a complex web of challenges. On the one hand, it is indicative of potential economic dynamism, while on the other infrastructural deficiencies — in housing, sanitation and transportation — strains their socio-political fabric. Makeshift and informal settlements are becoming ubiquitous, creating conflicts around competing questions of legality and rights. The potential implications for health in communities that lack clean water and sanitation and are densely populated are enormous. Moreover, deficiencies in transport systems hinder economic mobility, while limited access to quality employment intensifies socioeconomic disparities. Beyond these infrastructural and economic challenges lie other socio-cultural transformations which also need to be addressed.

DevISSues engages with this phenomenon and the challenges it produces in this issue. Shuaib Lwasa's article on connecting history to contemporary and possible futures explains that while the historical roots of urbanization in Africa have variances across countries and regions, the challenges are broadly similar. West Africa urbanized earlier, while East Africa is still transitioning from agrarian economies. Nevertheless, megacities on all ends of the continent are struggling with informal settlements and infrastructure deficits in the presence of non-responsive governance institutions. But, with the youthful and innovative demographic that these cities possess, Professor Lwasa stresses that there is also an opportunity for an innovative rethink of city planning, governance and financing. Meanwhile, furthering this argument, Beatrice Hati and Alice Menya's article boldly claims urban planning in Africa has failed and proposes a new de-colonial approach that moves the field beyond the standardized planning which leans on western ideologies and adapting governance by merging formal systems with grassroots-led configurations which involve both state and non-state actors, acknowledging even unconventional entities like gangs and cartels. Taken together, these approaches indicate a new, perhaps bright future for African urbanism.

We also take this opportunity to welcome Marijn Faling to the DevISSues editorial board. Marijn is Assistant Professor and teaches in the Governance and Development Policy major. Her research focuses on collaborative change processes around food security, inclusive development and climate change.

Sunil Tankha, DevISSues editorial board

### **Colophon**

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**Tel** +31 (0)70 4260 443

or +31 (0)70 4260 419

www.iss.nl

devISSues@iss.nl

**Editor** Jane Pockock

**Editorial Board** Lee Pegler, Marijn Faling, Sandra Nijhof, Sunil Tankha

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## Rector's Blog

### Joining ISS



15 August 2023. I enter the doors of the iconic building of the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague to start my job as its new rector. I am shown around the monumental hallways, along the picturesque stairways with a multilingual welcome and into my ridiculously large office (being used to a flex-working environment). The building is relatively empty, which only changes two weeks later when all the 'new batch' students arrive. I feel the anxious sensations of a newbie. I smell the adrenaline that all the newbies before me have left on the doorstep, in the hallway, on the stairs ... But I also feel the comforting and welcoming atmosphere created by the soon familiar faces of Gita and others at the reception desk, Rafael in the canteen and Sandy in the Butterfly bar.

What I am trying to say: ISS is not only the academic, EUR nr. 1 hotspot of development studies. Not only a vibrant intellectual arena where development economics, critical agrarian studies, migration and social justice, governance and legal mobilization, humanitarian studies and so many more issues are critically encountered, discussed, taught. It is also a place to be home.

This reminded me of a crucial insight from sociology. A social institution (like ISS) can simultaneously be at least three different things. It can be an organization, governed by structural procedures and protocols, rules and regulations. But it can also be a social movement, determined by societal aims and the visionary dream to change the world. And it can be a community where people belong and are supported and comforted. Three completely different dimensions, each with strengths and risks. The organizational dimension is helpful to sustain clear procedures, clarity of roles and solid structures. But it can easily turn into a bureaucratic beast. The communal dimension is essential to safeguard the personal and interpersonal character of working together. But it can also become a suffocating blanket. The movement dimension is the energizing force that aims at changing the world. But it can soon become a revolutionary monster.

I don't know what my years at ISS will bring. And that is true for most students, PhD candidates and others. But if we can keep these three dimensions together, be it in ISS or anywhere else, we will be able to tap into great resources, opportunities and challenges! And that is the only way to make the world a better place.

**Ruard Ganzevoort, Rector ISS**

# Urbanization in Africa: Connecting the histories to contemporary and possible futures



**Shuaib Lwasa is professor of urban resilience and global development at ISS**

Africa is urbanizing fast; on average at 4.4%. With close to one billion urban residents, the growth will continue and most likely double by 2050. On average, 60% of Africa's urban residents live in slums with an estimated 34% of its population living in cities with more than one million inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> Africa's urbanization trajectory over the last 100 years can be described as diverse between countries and regions. Some countries, such as those in West Africa, experienced early urbanization, while others urbanized in the 19th and 20th centuries largely due to natural resources development. Most African countries have the biggest proportion of the urban population concentrated in their capital cities. Some, for example in East Africa, are late urbanizing countries with agrarian economies forming their economic backbone. A few countries such as Chad, Niger and Malawi are considered to be at an early stage of urbanization.

There are a number of megacities such as Cairo, Lagos and Kinshasa alongside numerous smaller cities and towns. The cities portray differing population sizes

and spatial extents (UN-Habitat, 2008). The urbanization trajectory of Africa has posed both challenges and opportunities: challenges of addressing existential poverty, infrastructure deficit and institutions that are not responsive enough to the challenges; opportunities associated with a youthful population, ingenuity, creativity around innovations that have economic potential coupled with alternative infrastructure systems. The urbanization process brings new governance challenges, most of which are rooted in internationalized urban development strategies.

*'Economic transformation and growth have not followed urbanization in most of Africa.'*

Sustainable Development Goal 11 on inclusive and resilient cities points to a need for urban transformation in Africa. Such transformations would have to rethink several issues drawing on the multiple lessons explained in some detail as opportunities in this article. Lessons are drawn from increasing calls to rethink the planning of cities, governance structures, urban financing, siloed urban development, integrating the majority low income, innovative economic strategies and alternative infrastructure systems. Without rethinking these broad urban issues, achieving urban transformation based on current

strategies would require a deconstruction of a large part of these cities.

Over the years, city authorities in Africa have continued to assume that with planning, services, infrastructure and housing would improve. But data shows that deficits in the basic services and utilities widen if only formal utility systems are assessed. The deficit in infrastructure and services highlights the inequalities in many of these cities but also the inconsistencies of the urban governance institutions. Many urban development plans have achieved insignificant successes because they largely remain at a strategic level and less at the neighbourhood scale where there is a disjuncture between envisaged plans and actual developments (Lwasa, 2013). The coupling of multiple challenges has rendered urban governance and planning a failure in many of the cities, resulting in continued organic development, the emergence of an informal economy and diverse infrastructure and services that contrast the centralized infrastructure systems. Centralized infrastructure service systems are often envisaged as the benchmark for measuring the progress of a city, and indeed many city authorities have grounded their performance measures in, for example, how many kilometres of road are constructed, how many houses are connected to water or sanitation, what proportion of waste is collected against revenue accruals from urban municipal services and collectible rents.

Against the backdrop of the preceding synthesis of the urbanization challenge, this article postulates that urbanization in

Africa provides good lessons to draw from and design, implement and promote alternative pathways for urban development. From housing, diverse infrastructure, innovative livelihood activities, patterns of growth and sprawl, economy, labour market, industrious innovativeness and social differentiation, African cities of all sizes still offer opportunities, careers and lifetime experiences for many people in Africa (Ernstson et al., 2010; Simon, 2010; UN-Habitat, 2008). Urban Africa has demonstrated sustaining of livelihoods and provided diverse opportunities that create compelling reasons to rethink the city in Africa (Lwasa, 2014).

### City-regions exerting prominence

Beyond mega-cities in Africa, what can be observed is the extending nature of urban functionality over large tracts of land, often beyond administrative boundaries. This is both an opportunity but also a challenge, given the sometimes inflexible jurisdictional mandates.

The city-region is also an example of African urbanism that differs from other continents. This spread of urban function over extended areas can also be looked at through a peri-urban lens where it is more than a distinction between urban and rural. Peri-urban areas are a mix of social income groups, where individual and collective arrangements fill the gap of utility planning and management. Localized committees, for example, provide water by drilling boreholes and installing infrastructure for distribution, with connected residents charged periodically. In terms of governing city-regions, many countries in Africa have established super-governance institutions such as metropolitan institutions and larger administrative units in response to the compelling logic that the spatial urban functionality of infrastructure and utilities should be

managed beyond specific administrative boundaries. Thus urban transportation, water, waste and sanitation utilities and, lately, climate response measures transcend individual jurisdictions. Cities such as Kinshasa, Lagos, Cairo, Nairobi, Kampala and Dar es Salam have embraced the city-regional framework to plan and govern regions around which these cities lie. In some countries (Senegal, Egypt and Tanzania), the city-region has been coupled with building new satellite capitals away from the existing primate cities. But even with such an approach, urban development and governance aligns with the notion of city-region. To this end, Un-Habitat published a guide on spatial and territorial planning with, among others, the aim to harness the urban agglomeration benefits in terms of infrastructure planning, environmental benefits in terms of

*'...deficits in the basic services and utilities widen if only formal utility systems are assessed.'*



ecosystem enhancement and restoration for resilience through planning for city-regions.

### Diversity in urban Africa

Urban Africa illustrates diversity in many aspects: spatial imprint, governance systems, urban economies, distinctiveness of social income groups, inequalities, the nature of infrastructure and biophysical ecologies. In terms of spatial imprint, urban Africa has emerged with multiple patterns or mosaics that have semblances. This is related to the shape and density of cities, with large cities having areas with low density with, in many cases, the footprint of cities growing faster than the population. These are mainly observed in respect to the types and layout of houses, roads and streets, land-use configuration and green spaces. While most cities and towns are managed by institutions with historical roots in the emergence of modern planned cities, they have all continued interactions and features of formal and informal arrangements of governance. Where service and utility gaps exist, informal governance institutions have emerged; but at the same time formal institutions are riddled with informality in achieving their public service mandates.

In respect to urban economies, urbanization in Africa is yet to achieve



*Banking on the streets of Lagos*



*'The urbanization trajectory of Africa has posed both challenges and opportunities'*

its full economic potential. Economic transformation and growth have not followed urbanization in most of Africa. The economic activities within cities are diverse with manufacturing, export-oriented infrastructure and small to medium-scale industry occurring on the foundations of a large informal economy. Trading, micro-manufacturing, recycling and urban services that are different from centralized services are characteristic of Africa. Around 60% of urban unemployment and over 90% of jobs are informal. Diversity is also depicted by the provision of diverse infrastructure including off-grid, hybrid and heterogeneous basic utilities (water, sanitation, energy, roads and social services). African cities also have high inequality, with Gini coefficients on average of 0.54. Social inequality is also illustrated by the differing qualities of houses, roads, infrastructure, sanitation options, waste collection coverage and access to public green space. Issues of eviction threats from land occupied for decades are common in many African cities. Land grabbing has also not spared the critical ecological zones in urban Africa, including agricultural land that is important for maintenance of food security. But perhaps some of the negative consequences of disparate urban governance systems are in respect to how wastes are exported to peri-urban and rural areas, affecting the ecosystems and causing feedback consequences of polluted water sources on which cities rely.

### Opportunities in urban Africa

African cities are areas of concentrated resource consumption but also places where ingenious innovations that offer alternative development approaches have taken root. There are probably possibilities, but some of these opportunities are embodied in the youthful population that is employable but not in mainstream formal employment. Thus micro-small-medium-enterprises (MSMEs) with links to global value chains have emerged but yet to be scaled up. MSMEs can be a vehicle for localizing globalized processes and prosperity through disruptive and innovative technologies and hybridized infrastructure. The potential and expandable solutions could enhance equity, address climate change, create sustainable cities and build resilient urban systems. Thus harnessing these opportunities and creating pathways to expand the possibilities can provide alternative pathways to urban development in Africa. The importance of Africa and cities in the Global South in the transition from path-dependence requires radical system changes in physical, institutional and financing mechanisms, transformative governance and innovative financing.

A full list of references is included in DevISSues online.

1 OECD/SWAC (2020). *Africa's Urbanization Dynamics 2020*. OECD Publishing, Paris.

# Where are they now?



## Mohamed Kamal

**Study programme** Children, Youth and Development

**Year of graduation** 2007

**Country of origin** Egypt

**Current occupation** Country Director of Plan International in South Sudan

**What made your time at**

**ISS special?** The academic and social life. ISS is not only an institution that provides quality academic studies but also one that invests in building bridges of understanding and multiculturalism amongst all students.

**What is your best memory**

**of ISS?** When I graduated and received my diploma!

I felt that I had become much more confident and passionate and more committed to the issues affecting children, girls and women.

**What does ISS mean to you**

**now?** It is a platform for personal, human and professional positive change! A place where I found my heart and mind!



## Libby Mella

**Study programme** Local & Regional Development

**Year of graduation** 2003

**Country of origin** Philippines

**Current occupation** Gender in Emergency Advisor

**What made your time at ISS**

**special?** Meeting and learning from people from diverse backgrounds, connecting theories and practices; learning not just from books but from the actual and diverse experiences of classmates and professors.

**What is your best memory**

**of ISS?** The International Day – we danced an ethnic Filipino dance while also enjoying the presentations and food from other cultures. Intense experience joining the anti-Iraq war demonstration in Amsterdam with 2 buses of ISS students

**What does ISS mean to you**

**now?** ISS provides a platform for solid academic teaching while benefiting from the great balance of interacting with diverse students and professors. In recent years, development and humanitarian sectors have started to embrace diversity, inclusion and decolonization which I think ISS has been shaping for a long time.



## Harriet Kongin

**Study programme** Local & Regional Development

**Year of graduation** 2001

**Country of origin** Kenya

**Current occupation** Policy & Strategy Adviser, United Nations Joint Programme on HIV and AIDS

**What made your time at ISS**

**special?** It brought together students from all continents and supported the further education of professionals from developing countries. Apart from offering top-notch, education and having great professors and lecturers, ISS opened my world view and connected me to so many friends from across the globe. This is the place I learned to appreciate diversity! I feel nostalgic thinking of the great experience.

**What is your best memory**

**of ISS?** The International Day where we all came together and displayed our diverse cultures – it was colourful and amazing how the world can come together under the ISS roof.

**What does ISS mean to you**

**now?** The epitome of knowledge, diversity and practicability. The meaning of 'think globally, act locally' has been brought home to me!



## Bijoy Kumar Barua

**Study programme** Post Graduate Diploma in Rural and Agricultural Project Planning

**Year of graduation** 1981

**Country of origin**

Bangladesh

**Current occupation**

I retired in February 2006 as Additional Director General after 32 years of service with the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development. I now do freelance consultancies.

**What made your time at ISS special?** The whole-hearted cooperation of faculty, fellow course mates, other participants and staff made my stay at ISS special.

**What is your best memory**

**of ISS?** Meeting brilliant people from all over the world and studying in a multidisciplinary approach to development studies.

**What does ISS mean to you**

**now?** ISS means life-long friendships and the endless possibilities to contribute to the socio economic development of the world makes it invaluable.

**Our cities have failed ...**

# Decolonizing urban planning in the Afrocentric

**How can rapidly urbanizing African cities realize just transitions while still prescribing the same conventional planning approaches that reproduced marginalization from the outset? This article discusses urban planning amidst 'unorthodox' manifestations of urbanization in Africa's cities. The failure of conventional planning systems in informal settlements forms a premise, with emergent frugal planning approaches such as Special Planning Areas (SPA) in Nairobi offering prospects for new rhythms of urban planning and development. We stress here that our reference to 'failure' is not meant to discount the substantive progress by Africa's cities towards a sustainable urbanization. It is rather a point of departure to inform better urban planning practice.**



**Beatrice Hati is doctoral researcher at ISS and research and urban development associate at the International Centre for Frugal Innovation/ Nuvoni Centre for Innovation Research**



**Alice Menya is urban programme coordinator at the International Centre for Frugal Innovation / Nuvoni Centre for Innovation Research**

## Planning in African cities has failed

Urbanization in Africa is happening at unprecedented rates, presenting unique challenges in planning and managing urban development (OECD, UNECA & AfDB, 2022). As cities transform rapidly, informal urbanism, which occurs outside the purview of formal planning frameworks, has emerged as an alternative pathway to city development. Consequently, planning narratives are hegemonized by failure stories owing to the informal construction of cities. Seemingly, compliance with existing regulatory frameworks is considered planning success and the contrary castigated as failure. Afrocities are characterized by 'informal-formal' dualities. Informal urbanism is definitively considered 'illicit', bearing hallmarks of 'failure', while formal urbanism is deemed desirable; the epitome of 'success'. Yet Africa's urban realities are complex and dynamic, transcending such counterproductive binaries.

The continuation of elitist colonial planning legacies is linked to present-day

urban planning shortfalls (Wanjiru-Mwita & Giraut, 2020). In Nairobi, for example, a colonial heritage of socio-spatial segregation persists, albeit implicitly, evidenced by the imposition of unrealistically high standards in the quest for modernistic, urban development. Contrasting urbanscapes of planned, gated communities alongside informal settlements (Fig. 1) thus persist.

Moreover, rather idealistic regulatory frameworks are crafted without evaluating the existing social, financial and political capital assets (Denoon-Stevens et al., 2022). Planning shortfalls are further aggravated by situated power contestations, political interferences and bureaucratic processes which we do not recapitulate in this article but which have been unpacked elsewhere (Watson, 2009). While informal settlements are historically rebuffed, they account for 60-80% of Africa's urbanism, thus predominantly contributing to city-making in this region (Carrizosa, 2022). There is growing realization that informality is a 'defining' feature of our world (Roy, 2009), and positive framings of urban informality are emerging in policy making (ibid. 2022). This has prompted a gradual shift towards alternative, frugal planning paradigms which embrace 'the informal' in lieu of fighting informality to 'clean the city'. The perceived 'failure' hence has its opportunities.

## Failing is good...

The persistent impoverishment, heightened vulnerabilities and multiple precarities in informal settlements may be interpreted as a depiction of how conventional planning has failed Africa's urban majority. This failure, however,



Left: Fig. 1: The 'informal' in Mukuru and formal environs © Unequal scenes

*'... 'failure' has created a space for contestation against counterproductive planning approaches ... by embracing informality and its frugality'*

yields a double-edged outcome for understanding and planning the city. On the one hand, it entraps already marginalized communities into vicious cycles of vulnerability and survival. Conversely, the failure has created a space for contestation against counterproductive planning approaches, thereby spanning boundaries by embracing informality and its frugality. It is this latter thread that we wish to draw lessons from, dubbing it 'good failure'. The most eminent fruit of the perceived failure is a narrative shift. Emerging theses and practices posit informal settlements as 'engines of the city' where dynamism, collective action, community vitality, frugality and entrepreneurship conglomerate to create new forms of urbanism (Fransen et al., 2023a; Hati, 2020). This lens deconstructs the

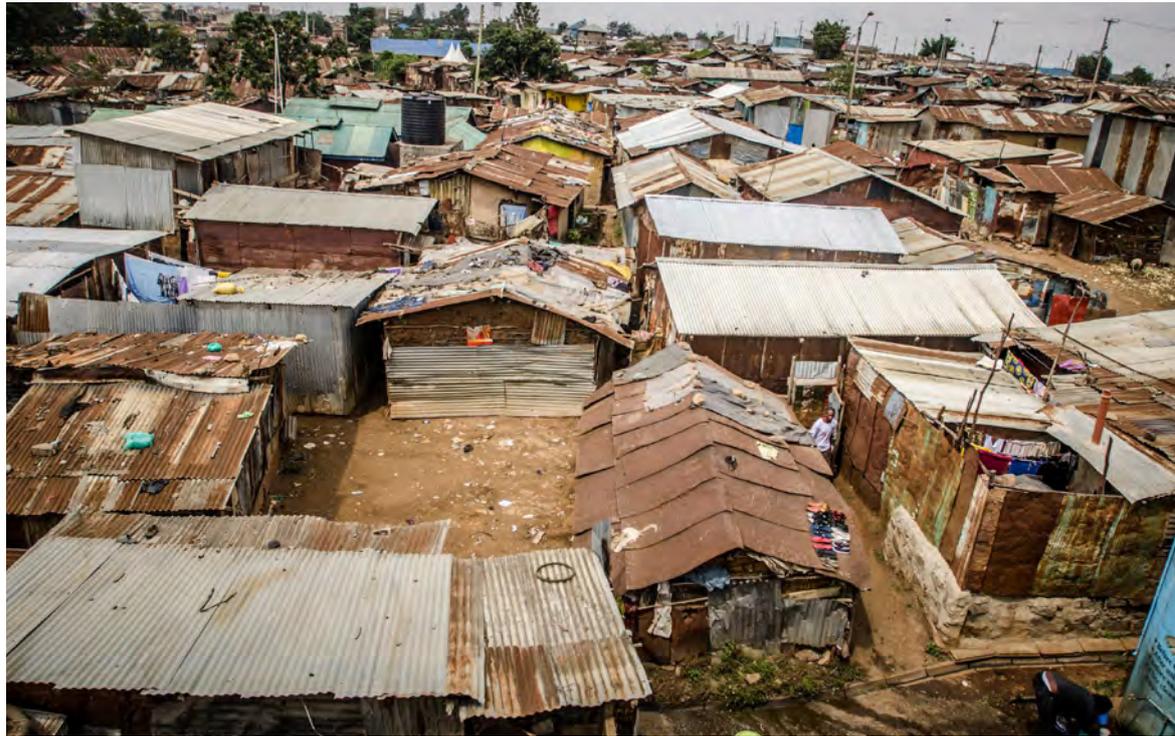
negative stereotypes about informality and attempts to add the perspectives of 'informal urbanism as new way of life'. This added nuance is not intended to romanticize informality, but rather to broaden the limited understanding and depiction of Africa's heterogeneous urbanity and to prompt rethinking of planning systems; hence shifting from a shallow marginal lens that obscures planning processes (Fig. 2) into a contextual lens with multiple intertwined realities that are central to meaningful planning (Fig. 3).

'Good failure' helps us understand the 'informal' as places and spaces confronted with vulnerability but which pro-actively engage in city-making through complex, dynamic socio-political processes.

The perceived failure has also accelerated reflective planning in re of conventional and emerging planning frameworks. With conventional approaches, planning *for* informal settlements or lack thereof, presents a paradox that perpetuates exclusive urbanism. *Lack* of planning fuels the stigmatization and disparagement of informal settlements with consequent socioeconomic precarities. Conversely, planning *for* them disregards the community's agency with consequent forced evictions, decontextualized proposals and sparse community ownership.

In pursuit of alternatives, unconventional planning strategies are emerging, such as Kenya's Special Planning Area (SPA) approach. This is a community-led, evidence-backed process that permits planning beyond the established 'formal' standards. It has created a radical shift from 'planning for' communities to 'planning with' communities, with an advanced process of co-creating alternative planning strategies (GCA, 2022). Its disruptive nature has leveraged frugal innovation in building cross-sectoral coalitions, engaging communities in action planning, defining adaptive planning standards and injecting conservative surgery to infrastructure planning (Hati, 2020).

These practices and debates of 'planning in the informal' demonstrate that urban planning is a highly intricate, historically entrenched practice which must learn and evolve continually. Urban changemakers must awaken and deliberately depart from practices that pronounce colonial, capitalist and



Right: Fig. 2: Korogocho 'informal settlement' © APHRC, 2022

Below: Fig. 3: This too is Korogocho © Nuvoni Centre for Research Innovation



imperialistic heritage. But how can urban planning take such action?

### **Towards new rhythms of urban planning**

The failure of conventional planning and the evolution of alternative (adaptive) planning offers four points of action to decolonize urban planning:

- **Planning beyond 'prescriptions'**

Standardized planning frameworks create an important baseline for the practice, but are largely constructed on Western ideologies, which is far from Afrocentric realities. These frameworks must be rationalized to fit the context. For instance, the spatial requirements in

the planning standards often make impracticable demands on informal settlements. Yet frugal strategies such as 'the conservative surgery' illustrated on Fig. 4 have created alternatives. Prescription reproduces marginality which can be avoided through contextualized standards.

- **Adapting governance**

'Formal' governance systems which exclusively hinge on conventionality are insufficient for the complex urbanism in Afrocities. The reconfiguration of governance into multi-actor, multi-level frameworks involving a plurality of state and non-state actors across 'formal and informal' spectra gives traction to

adaptive governance configurations. The SPA governance configurations illustrate such fluid arrangements. These models are grassroots-led and hinge on a shared (community) vision, power equity among actors, shared responsibility and resource-matching. Embracing the 'informal' into governance means conscious interaction with contentious governance agents such as gangs, cartels and 'slumlords'. Perhaps such a bricolage of formal and informal governance systems may negotiate pathways to just urban transitions.

- **Restructuring participation**

Participatory planning must be (re)structured to place communities

*'There is growing realization that informality is a 'defining' feature of our world.'*

at the centre of decision-making whilst establishing and sustaining strategic linkages to multi-level state and non-state actors. This accelerates collective exploration and experimentation with context-fit solutions. A shift from mere consultation to promoting open dialogue and partnerships among various actors has a strong potential to shift mindsets from rigid conventional approaches to a negotiated planning approach. Hence all actors have a stake, leveraging their strengths, creativities and available resources to maximize value and mutually benefit from the process.

**• Maximizing research value**

Robust, community-generated evidence has been the antecedent of the disruptive planning processes discussed in this article. For example, the 'poverty penalty'

and 'Too pressed to wait' research insights compelled the adoption of the first SPA in a large informal settlement – Mukuru. The ratification of another SPA in Mathare informal settlements, spearheaded by Mathare SPA Research Collective, is equally evidence-based, albeit uniquely premised by widespread research saturation, research fatigue and impact-less research; what we call 'Research Waste'. A database of research on Mathare is being developed to support evidence-based planning and as a tool to address unsystematic research duplication. We underscore the importance of research in informing

policy and strengthening advocacy for better planning. Nonetheless, there is urgent need to tame the fast-paced knowledge circus, especially in informal settlements, and build vigilance around research methodologies, power imbalances and research uptake. As we embed these 'new' rhythms towards an impactful urban planning practice, it is imperative to engage the multiple actors previously mentioned as well as next-generation urbanists and change-makers in transformative thinking.

A full list of references is included in DevISSues online.

Road Classification	Width ROW - Conventional standards	Social Costs	Width ROW - Alternative standards	Social Costs
Arterial Roads	50-60m	Displacement by conventional standards:	12m	Displacement by conventional standards:
Sub-Arterial Roads	30-40m		9m	
Collector Road	20-30m	Structures = 22,871 Proportion = 100%	5.5m	Structures = 4989 Proportion = 21.8%
Local Street	5m		3m	
Area needed for Roads	279.12Ha		44.46Ha	

Above and left: Fig. 4: Conservative surgery. © Hati, 2022.





Malika Ouacha is a lecturer and researcher at the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University Rotterdam

What happens when a country gets hit by an unexpected, highly damaging earthquake? What does the aid this country receives afterwards look like when it has a diaspora community of more than one million people? And how does a tragic event such as an earthquake affect those million people and their diaspora identity? While diaspora identity is often defined by referring to the country of origin, in this article Malika Ouacha discusses how the earthquake in Morocco affected her and led her to foster a deeper understanding of her identity as member of the Moroccan diaspora in the Netherlands.

## (Be)longing to the village: How the earthquake in Morocco reveals the importance of the homeland in diaspora identity

As I was getting ready for another day of Family Constellation theory teaching, I heard my husband scream from the living room: 'What? An earthquake last night in Marrakech on the scale of 6.8 Richter?!'. I didn't really understand what he meant. 'An earthquake? That heavy? But that never happened before in our region', I thought. At the same time, I remembered that there had been one in 1960 in Agadir, a city some 250 kilometres to the south of Marrakech.

The longer Nicolaas, my husband, continued to read the news article out loud, the more I understood that the news was real, that it really had happened. And that I had to start searching for my phone and call as many people as possible to find out whether they were safe. After trying several times and not being able to reach them, we decided to wait a bit longer. In the following hours, friends and relatives confirmed their safety, but they had a hard time describing what had happened. It was scary, unreal and immensely tragic. Lives were lost, but initially no-one knew how many. Thoughts started mulling through my head, and I found myself asking: *How do you grieve such an event when you have*

*just recovered from a pandemic which your country (Morocco in my case) barely survived?*

Although I feel like I found my home in both two countries, I was fascinated by the instant feeling I experienced right after the news reached us. I live my life miles away, and so do many other diasporans, yet I felt that the affected people's need for shelter and protection was my own need for a second or two. Does this mean that one of the two countries is more important? Or that I am emotionally more attached to one compared to the other? I don't think so, but I wouldn't want to experience a natural disaster to find out. Therefore, I continued trying to go about life as usual that day and in the days that followed, while also trying to process what had happened and what this could mean for the future. All the while, I kept feeling deep down that nothing would be the same after an earthquake like this one. Because although I was born and raised in Europe and only lived in Marrakech and the High Atlas Mountains for a few years, the annual return of my family and myself to the village we hail from each summer during my childhood and early adulthood resulted in a feeling

of everlasting belonging to this specific region.

It made sense to me to respect my parents' rules to speak only Tachelhiyt, the South-Moroccan language, in our household, even though we lived in the Netherlands, so that we could return to the village safely every summer, knowing that my siblings and I spoke the language of the village. I could independently have conversations with my grandparents and cousins, walk to my uncle Mohamed alone and talk to people on the streets. My parents were assured of my safety in the village because I could ask a stranger on the street to assist me if I needed help. I could do this in the Netherlands, too, but I always sensed that my parents felt that my siblings and I were safer in the village in the Atlas Mountains, more protected. It seemed as if, even fifty years after having moved, the Netherlands still felt like a temporary place of residence to them. They never called it home like I did, although the two places both always felt like home to me.

### Diaspora identity: how far is too close?

This lack of a sense of belonging in the Netherlands and the corresponding



Photo by Moein Rezaalizade on Unsplash

sense of still belonging in Morocco, which is how many diasporans still feel, is the reason why the earthquake affected more than just properties, workplaces and human lives that were lost — it also affected diaspora identity despite the distance between those countries we were born and raised in and those countries we originate from. The earthquake made me ask whether we, as Moroccan diaspora, still belong there and whether our roots affect our lives here in Europe.

This left me to question whether our understanding of diaspora identity has really hit the core of both the phenomenon and the theoretical concept. Or whether we still hover above its official definitions in academic and political debates. Is it truly just ethnicity and cultural norms and values? Or is it

the combination of these three concepts and our sentiments, our individual emotional household and the way we view and experience the homeland? I tend to lean towards the latter conclusion, given my reflections and analysis of the recent earthquakes in Morocco and Turkey earlier this year.

### **Do we need saving from a permanent saviour?**

I'm still reading one after the other requests for donations from people who ask for money, food supplies, tents and other things needed to survive. Yet a long-term plan from the authorities remained absent until 14 September this year when, according to *Le Matin* newspaper, King Mohamed VI, Morocco's current ruler, donated USD 100 million to implement a long-term resettlement plan to rebuild the homes and lives of the

victims of the earthquake. Where victims will be relocated to remains unclear, but affected friends and relatives spoke of the King's act as a 'a ray of sunshine during a heavy thunderstorm'.

In a country where the king has the last word in every decision needing to be made, this gesture signifies the presence of the government in a way that the region has never seen, as South Morocco has been and continues to be one of the least developed regions in its entire kingdom. I sensed an unexpected feeling of relief, although I saw that many volunteers and philanthropists had devoted their time and means to the victims much earlier than the King had.

So perhaps the King's ruling superseded the efforts of international NGOs and other non-profit organizations who were helping the affected people with their best intentions but within their own terms. And perhaps he therefore embodies a permanent saviour, as the king remains the king whose moral responsibility it is to look out after his own citizens. Maybe a permanent saviour saves this part of my identity too, and therefore that of a diaspora as a collective, just as the country is left in better hands now that a long-term plan has been demonstrated. Or maybe he saves only the memory of a country we once knew and still hold on to. Even if it is just in our nostalgic minds.

This could mean that the place my parents call home is left in better hands and therefore a part of me, too, as it is a place close to my heart where I spent fruitful years in my early twenties and studied anthropology, volunteered at an orphanage and did my first real ethnographic fieldwork after my graduation. A place where my late parents, grandparents and ancestors were finally laid to rest, where close friends and relatives have their homes, where they enjoy their workplaces in the (finally post-pandemic) popular touristic medina and the ancient kasbah and where we continue to meet several times a year. A place where I showed my Dutch husband the forever solid foundation of my Moroccan values and norms, which no lifetime outside of South Morocco could ever suppress.

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## Farewell to rector Professor Inge Hutter staff



In June, ISS bid farewell to outgoing rector, Professor Inge Hutter who gave her valedictory lecture on 'Relevance for society: culture & values and leadership @society'. Inge's valedictory was not a lecture in the traditional sense. As an expression of her mode of working and her values, her presentation covered her early years as an academic, her challenges and achievements at ISS, her personal life and future ambitions.

## MA in Development Studies graduation students



This year's MA in Development Studies graduation will take place on 20 December. Follow the ceremony live via Livestream as our students receive their hard-earned diplomas.

## Welcome to new rector Professor Ruard Ganzevoort staff

Ruard took up his rectorship of ISS in August, following 6 years as Dean of the Faculty of Religion and Theology at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. He gave his inaugural lecture on 'Development between extraction and compassion' during ISS' 71st Dies Natalis in October.



## ISS PhD candidate awarded the Africa Evidence Leadership Award award

Deo-Gracias Houndolo, received the award for his significant contribution to enhancing evaluation capacity development in Africa. The award is presented to individuals who have demonstrated outstanding and enduring leadership in promoting evidence-informed decision-making in Africa.



## ISS alumna appointed Ghana's chief justice alumni

In June, Gertrude Araba Esaaba Torkornoo was sworn in as the Chief Justice of Ghana. Gertrude completed her MA at ISS in 2001, specializing in international law and organizational development.



## New PCC chairholder Dr Sebastian Ureta staff

Sebastian Ureta's research focuses on technology and citizen science in the face of climate change. He will hold the Chair for two years (2023-2025).



## In Memoriam

As an ISS community we send our heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of those former students and staff who have passed away in recent months.

### Zie Katarwa Gariyo

We are sad to share the news that ISS alumnus Zie Katarwa Gariyo from Uganda passed away on 6 May 2023 at the age of 68.

Zie founded the Uganda Debt Network, the leading advocacy organization for national budget advocacy, external debt management and anti-corruption. Zie graduated from ISS in 1994 with an MA in Development Studies, specializing in Agricultural and Rural Development.



### Maria Mies

Emeritus Professor Maria Mies passed away in May this year. She was the first senior lecturer in Women and Development at ISS.



### Hans van Ginkel

A true world citizen, Professor Hans van Ginkel was Chair of the ISS' Board of Supervisors from 2011 until 2016. He sadly passed away in July this year.



### Ozden Yalim

ISS alumna Özden Yalim passed away at the end of July. Özden was at ISS in 1976 studying Public Administration.



## PhD defences PhD



**Dala Duo**  
9 October 2023  
Coping well or aging well? Elderly care and aging in Tibetan Regions in Western China



**Constance Dupuis**  
2 October  
Navigating care, wellbeing and place in later life: Feminist pursuits in aging



**Margarita de Vries Mecheva**  
24 July 2023  
Essays on the economics of nutrition transition in Indonesia



**Lilian Sol Cueva**  
19 July 2023  
Women's visions/ imaginaries: Futuring energy for Mexico City's public markets



**Tamara Soukotta**  
7 July 2023  
The past in the present: Segregation and relational peacebuilding in Ambon



**Renata Cavalcanti Muniz**  
12 June  
Economic diplomacy as a tool for development: A critical analysis of the use of economic diplomacy in Dutch port development investments in Brazil

## Dr Binyam Demena wins best paper award award



Binyam won the award during the 5th Asia Conference on Business and Economic Studies for his paper on the impact of export promotion on the intensive margin of exports.

## MA programme application now open students

The application portal for the 2024-2025 intake of the MA in Development Studies at ISS opened in October. Apply now to one of the best development studies courses in the EU.



# 'Humanitarian Studies is about dignity and it is about humanity'



Tom Hansell is HSC coordinator

**The Humanitarian Studies Centre (HSC) launched on 31 August with a whole-day event at ISS. The Centre, which is hosted at ISS, will become a hive of research, education, impact and networking around the field of 'Humanitarian Studies'. It is led by its Director, Professor Thea Hilhorst, along with a team of academic and professional staff.**

The Humanitarian Studies Centre will also partner with and host several other organizations, including KUNO (Platform for Knowledge Exchange in the Netherlands), the SSRi (Safety and Security for Researchers Initiative) and the IHSA (International Humanitarian Studies Association). It was set up following Professor Hilhorst's 2022 Spinoza Prize.

## So, what is Humanitarian Studies?

When Professor Hilhorst was announced as a Spinoza Prize laureate, the selection committee noted her pioneering work in the field of 'Humanitarian Studies'. Whilst academics both inside the Netherlands and around the world have worked on elements of the field for several years, Professor Hilhorst offered the following definition of it during her speech launching the HSC:

*'The study of societies and vulnerable communities experiencing humanitarian crisis originating from disaster, conflict, refugee situations and/ or political collapse. It studies the causes and impact of crisis; how people, communities and authorities respond to them, including efforts for prevention and preparedness; how humanitarian action and other external interventions are organized and affect the recovery from crises; and the institutional changes that crises and crisis response engender.'*

This definition, says Hilhorst, is a development of how the field was seen in previous years, having been based around the study of Humanitarian Action – how people working with and for humanitarian organizations act and carry out their work. 'I felt it was needed to broaden the definition of humanitarian studies, away from a focus on international humanitarian action to take societies undergoing humanitarian crises as the starting point', says Hilhorst.

*'The launch ... is also a call to build a network of researchers, practitioners and policy makers that build collaboratively...'*

'Perhaps because of my background in development studies, I have always carefully situated humanitarian action in society. Humanitarian action, in my mind, is an autonomous field embedded in society, as I elaborated with Bram Jansen on the idea of the humanitarian arena.'

The Humanitarian Studies Centre, like the definition put forward by Professor Hilhorst, will be open and in conversation with researchers and practitioners from

multiple related disciplines: 'We are like siblings in a large family, looking alike yet all with our distinctive features. These include conflict and peace studies, development studies, feminist and post-colonial studies, international relations, disaster studies and refugee studies. It's not just academic efforts that contribute to the field either; practitioners are also included – hence the hosting of KUNO at the HSC. The launch of the HSC is also a call to build a network of researchers, practitioners and policy makers that build collaboratively to have the most positive effect in Humanitarian Studies', says Hilhorst.

The launch event also served as a call to build a 'network of researchers, practitioners and policy makers that build collaboratively to have the most positive effect in Humanitarian Studies'. The HSC will, over the coming years, act to convene this network through regular events and chances to showcase the latest research from within the field and connect it to practice and policy.

## Putting societies and people at the centre

By putting societies undergoing humanitarian crises in focus, Humanitarian Studies, as defined by Professor Hilhorst, stands in contrast to previous approaches, where 'scholars were mainly interested in the exceptionality of crisis, the violence

characterizing crisis, or assumed societies lost their organizing principles to become tabula rasa or institutional voids altogether during a crisis. Few people asked themselves how families managed to feed children, send them to school, how babies were born, what happened to couples falling in love, who would help people with nothing to eat’.

This, says Hilhorst, is part of a wider move within the study of crises towards looking at the people experiencing the crisis, rather than the humanitarian workers reacting to it. ‘While a plethora of research and lived experience showed that people help each other during crisis (everybody would die if they had to wait for international humanitarian actors), this largely escaped the eye of the academic world just as much as the aid community. Today, we almost see the opposite happening, with the aid sector celebrating the resilience of local communities, the self-reliance of people on the move and the everyday care they extend to one another.’

But, she adds, whilst it is important to celebrate resilience and solidarity, ‘that doesn’t mean that the field of Humanitarian Studies takes a rose-tinted



Cup cakes to celebrate the launch  
© Sarah Njoroge

view of what happens during crises. Nor can the field ignore the politicization of crisis situations. Lots of research has testified to the politics of crisis and the ways in which actors reconfigure themselves to benefit from the crisis interventions or change the existing order according to their own interests and views. This happens at the international as much as national and the local levels, where, for example, chiefs may ask for sexual favours in exchange for assistance or local traders may profit from crises by doubling their prices’.

### A value-laden field

The field of Humanitarian Studies, which centres societies undergoing crises, is a value-laden field, says Hilhorst. ‘Humanitarian Studies is about dignity and it is about humanity. The father of modern humanitarianism, Henri Dunant, proposed that the key idea of humanitarianism is the desire to save lives and restore human dignity. He derived this notion from a tradition of Christian charity that did not seek to radically alter society. However, the notion of humanity has also inspired subsequent scholars. Last year I was in the beautiful city of Davos in Switzerland, where a winter walkway is dedicated to Thomas Mann, who wrote *Der Zauberberg* (the Magic Mountain) during a stay at Davos. One of the quotes displayed on the walkway says: “What then, is humanism? It is the love of humanity, and therefore it is a rebellion against everything that tarnishes and devalues humanity.” That is for me the value that drives Humanitarian Studies.’

### The launch of the HSC: a day of taking stock of Humanitarian Studies

The launch on 31 August showcased the work of more than 36 scholars and practitioners, all of whom relate to Humanitarian Studies. From



Thea Hilhorst  
at the launch  
© Sarah Njoroge

*‘Henri Dunant proposed that the key idea of humanitarianism is the desire to save lives and restore human dignity.’*

presentations about research into alternative ethical hermeneutics that seek to centre marginalized groups within humanitarian work and governance, to explorations of Dutch refugee policy and programmes, to the importance of including conflict resolution and transformation techniques within the humanitarian/development nexus, to how we communicate about humanitarian efforts and the power of procurement. This stimulating event is set to be replicated in the coming years to maintain the Humanitarian Studies network within the Netherlands and to convene scholars and practitioners. The day rounded off with presentations from the organizations hosted at the HSC: KUNO, SSRi and the IHSA.

### Future plans: research, education, impact and networking

The HSC will, in the coming years, work to develop an exciting programme of research led by Professor Thea Hilhorst,

*'The study of societies and vulnerable communities experiencing humanitarian crisis originating from disaster, conflict, refugee situations and/ or political collapse.'*

Dr Rod Mena (Deputy Director), Dr Kaira Zoe Cañete (Senior Researcher) and another Senior Researcher who will shortly join the team. Research themes will include ethical alternatives within humanitarianism, the effect of climate change on crisis, working with and accessing difficult or precarious contexts, the ethical and safety implications of carrying out humanitarian research and much more besides.

The Centre will also aim to be at the forefront of teaching around Humanitarian Studies, with a popular course at ISS for MA students, PhD

courses, public seminars and events and plenty more besides. Research and practice will be linked through a series of initiatives by the HSC with and in partnership with KUNO and other organizations, with the intention to regularly convene a lively network of Humanitarian Studies scholars, practitioners and policy makers to discuss and co-create new ideas around humanitarianism. All of this will also be linked to the IHSA to further increase impact. Professional staff at the Centre include Coordinator Thomas Ansell and Community Manager Gabriela Anderson Fernandez.



For more information about the Humanitarian Studies Centre, visit [iss.nl/hsc](http://iss.nl/hsc), or via LinkedIn and Twitter/X. A new website will be developed in the coming months!



Participants in discussion during the launch © Sarah Njoroge

## New publications



### Scholar-activism and land struggles

Written by Jun Borrás and Jennifer Franco, this new publication in the Initiatives of Critical Agrarian Studies small book series celebrates the contributions of scholar-activism in land struggles and scholarship. The book is available in paperback, hardcover and as an open access ebook.



### Handbook of global land and resource grabbing

Edited by Tsegaye Moreda, Andreas Neef, Chanrith Ngin and Sharlene Mollett, the compilation provides a cutting-edge, comprehensive overview of global land and resource grabbing. With case studies from both the Global South and Global North, the Handbook examines how resource grabbing of land, water, forests and minerals is intertwined with agriculture, mining, tourism, energy, biodiversity conservation, climate change, carbon markets and conflict.



## Creating spaces for meaningful dialogue

New ISS rector, **Professor Ruard Ganzevoort** and Scholas **vice president, Karen Vargas Perlaza** discuss the need for meaningful dialogue in a multicultural environment.

**Karen Vargas Perlaza (KVP):** Hello, it's nice to meet you as our new rector.

**Ruard Ganzevoort (RG):** Thanks Karen. So why did you come to ISS?

**KVP:** I worked for two years after my bachelor's and I felt that the moment was right to continue studying. I found ISS when I came to the Netherlands last December and really liked the perspective of diversity that this institute has. And then finances of course – though ISS doesn't have the lowest fees, it's good compared to other courses.

**RG:** It's interesting how you describe your reasons for choosing ISS. You have

your personal dreams, your background, the practicalities of the finances. And then the content of the educational programme, but also the values from which it's executed. ISS has this enormous diversity in terms of disciplines, the kind of work, people's background, personalities, their political views, religion, sexuality, everything.

**KVP:** In Colombia, intercultural means working with Afro-Colombians, indigenous populations, farmers and peasants. At ISS, interculturalism is very different. In my country, I never knew people from non-Western religions, for example, and here they're classmates! All that diversity brings great responsibility and I think we lack those conversations. During our course Collective Prevention of Unwanted Behaviour, we touched on a lot of broad topics, but even after six sessions people felt discriminated against or didn't understand harassment. I understand that ISS can't challenge cultural backgrounds, but is it possible to have a neutral point of understanding?

**RG:** I'm not sure about a neutral standpoint, but perhaps a common meeting ground. For example, if one person comes from a background which doesn't accept sexual diversity and another student belongs to the LGBTQ community, somehow they have to meet with respect. And that's not a neutral space because one person's existence is a struggle for the other person. Of all

*'...that could be a good starting point: to regularly train some students to promote dialogue.'*

*'ISS can't challenge cultural backgrounds but is it possible to have a neutral point of understanding?'*

places though, ISS is probably one of the best to learn to deal with difference.

**KVP:** I've seen diversity in reactions too. I have classmates who are really closed to sexual diversity when we're in small groups, but they don't make their disapproval public. But I have also seen more direct public disapproval; I find that really problematic.

**RG:** I find it even more troubling if people hide their opinions or talk behind someone's back. I don't have a problem with people who have objections to homosexuality and I don't have a problem with people who are gay. But as a community, our first step is dialogue and to understand each other. A real dialogue doesn't start between friends; a real dialogue starts with opposing views.

**KVP:** The institute has tried to create spaces for these conversations, but they aren't always facilitated. Last year we wanted to talk about masculinities, but we were told the institute had already had those discussions. And the same thing happened when we asked to talk about feminism; but we don't see the actions previously discussed being taken. I think it's important to keep having these conversations again and again and to take their outcomes seriously. And with a new rector and welfare officer maybe now we can start afresh!

**RG:** You're right. What we can and should do is not look away when there's an issue. What we can and should do is create awareness among students and staff about how to deal with unwanted behaviour. As students you're entitled to

a safe workspace, but it's also a joint responsibility. I can't do anything if I don't know, for instance, about discrimination that a student encounters. If you can sort the problem out yourselves, that's perfect, but if not, our responsibility is to make as safe an environment as possible. I think that's where dialogue comes in. We need to learn to ask questions rather than take positions. It's just a matter of practicing.

**KVP:** Yeah, and I agree it's good to involve everyone. By giving SCHOLAS (dialogue and conflict resolution) training, for example. We receive all kinds

*'ISS is probably one of the best places to learn to deal with difference.'*

of cases from students and sometimes our reactions are not ideal because we don't know what to do! And I understand it's difficult because we're only here for 15 months and every year a new batch needs the same information again quickly. So that could be a good starting point: to regularly train some students to promote dialogue.

**RG:** Our staff stays longer though and I'm intending to stay too. These are very important insights and I'm always open to suggestions on what we can do. And I'm still looking for that holy grail of dialogue. I don't know how to do it yet. So, we'll work on it. Thanks Karen.

Scan the qr code to read Ruard and Karen's whole conversation



## Development and Change

Development and Change is an interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal devoted to the critical analysis and discussion of current issues of development. It was established by the ISS in 1969, in response to the perceived need for a multidisciplinary journal dealing with all aspects of development studies.

### Volume 54, Number 4, July 2023

**Sustainable Development Frontiers: Is 'Sustainable' Cocoa Delivering Development and Reducing Deforestation?** Will Lock, Anthony Alexander

**The Myth of Counter-modern Ontologies: Indigenous People and the Modern Politics of Extractivism in Ecuador** Christian Tym

**Local Financial Institutions and Income Inequality: Evidence from Brazil's Credit Cooperative Movement** Philip Arestis, Peter Phelps

**Green Growth and the Balance-of-payments Constraint** Basil Oberholzer

**Misaligned Social Policy? Explaining the Origins and Limitations of Cash Transfers in Sudan** Muez Ali, Laura Mann

**State Life: Land, Welfare and Management of the Landless in Kerala, India** R.C. Sudheesh

**Outsourcing the Business of Development: The Rise of For-profit Consultancies in the UK Aid Sector** Brendan Whitty, Jessica Sklair, Paul Robert Gilbert, Emma Mawdsley, Jo-Anna Russon, Olivia Taylor

## Working Papers

The ISS Working Paper series provides a forum for work in progress which seeks to elicit comments and generate discussion. The series includes academic research by staff, PhD participants and visiting fellows, and award-winning research papers by graduate students.

**Breastfeeding practice and rural-urban livelihood in Dodoma, Tanzania** Dede, K. S., Kamanzi, A. & de Haan, L. ISS Working Papers Series no. 718.

**Can external interventions restrain conflict intensity? Eight hundred estimates from 1996 – 2020 say "probably not"** Demena, B. A., Anwar, A. and Murshed, S. M. ISS Working Papers Series no. 717.

**Legal, economic, and political perspectives on sanctions against Russia: an intermediate assessment** van Herik, L. & van Bergeijk, P. ISS Working papers series no. 716.

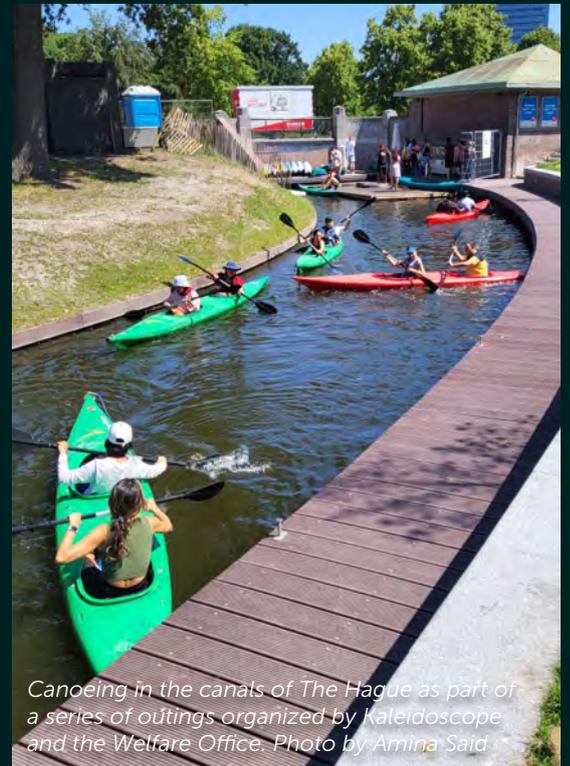
**Comparing the sanctions against Russia and Iran: VAR modelling of the political-economic impact of sanctions** van Bergeijk, P. & Faraji Dizaji, S. ISS Working papers series no. 715.

**Non-trade in the MENA revisited: systematic review and gravity analysis** Lahar, L., Demena, B. A. & van Bergeijk, P. ISS Working papers series no. 714

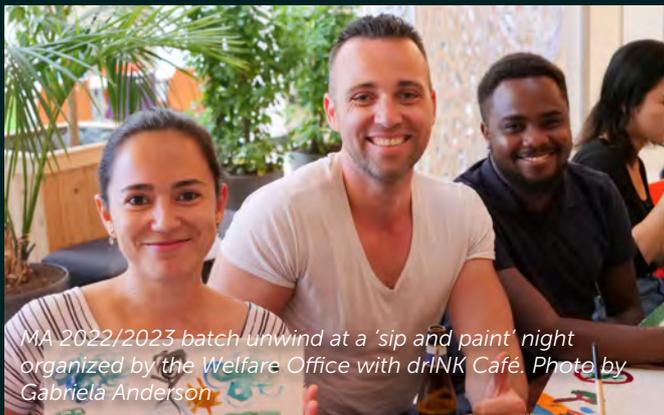
# STUDENT LIFE



Students participating in a canal clean up organized by the Environmental and Social Action student committees in collaboration with Kiteboard School



Canoeing in the canals of The Hague as part of a series of outings organized by Kaleidoscope and the Welfare Office. Photo by Amina Said



MA 2022/2023 batch unwind at a 'sip and paint' night organized by the Welfare Office with drINK Café. Photo by Gabriela Anderson



New MA students - weary after a long flight but happy to be at ISS. Photo by Oruarume A. Ejiroghene



MA students and PhD researchers attend a Drag Dinner Show in Rotterdam organized by Kaleidoscope and ISS Welfare Office



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