Call for proposals (CfP) for a conference on

City Diplomacy in Africa

The role of municipal actors in global policies and geopolitics

18 & 19 June 2024

Nairobi, Kenya

Background

The French Institute of International Relations (Ifri), UN-Habitat and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Africa co-organize the annual conference of the 3-years research program “Governing Africa’s Urban Transitions”, coordinated by Ifri. The event, which is implemented with the support of the French Institute of Research in Africa (IFRA) in Nairobi, aims at creating a better understanding of the in-vogue concept of “city diplomacy”, by discussing concrete cases of city-to-city collaboration and their impacts on policies and diplomacy, with a focus on the Eastern African region. The two days conference will bring together experts from academia, municipal and public institutions, as well as the private sector to share and discuss experiences and data but also to assess needs of municipal and decentralized stakeholders to enhance collaboration and exchange among each other.

The conference will take place on 18 and 19 June 2024 in the conference room of IFRA Nairobi (Laikipia Road, Kileleswha).

City diplomacy in Africa

Globally mayors, city managers and leaders of the decentralized government institutions are increasingly participating in international policy-making and geopolitics. In Africa, too, cities have become players on international policy and diplomatic scenes. In average, Africa’s cities grow relatively faster than in other world regions (about 4% per year), and the continent’s urban population has almost tripled since 1950.\(^1\) Given this rapid urbanization in both primary and secondary cities, African cities have been confronted with specific policy issues, for which they develop solutions and expertise, for instance in the areas of urban security, health, environment and climate change, as well as migration policies.\(^2\)

City stakeholders share their knowledge, expertise and best practices, for instance through city-to-city collaboration, such as twinning arrangements, but also in international policy fora where municipal and local government stakeholders meet and exchange. The biannual Africities

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\(^1\) https://population.un.org.

conference, is a prime example of policy and diplomatic exchange between these local stakeholders.

Henceforth, African cities are increasingly recognized and approached by international counterparts as experts and key actors of global action. They also play important roles actors, mediators and partners within a rapidly changing world order: the world is currently experiencing important geopolitical tensions with changing and new alliances, in which African stakeholders including cities take part. For instance, African cities and local governments conclude partnerships with decentralized stakeholders from so-called emerging countries and the Global South. They also maintain relationships with counterparts from countries, with which state diplomatic ties are disrupted (e.g. France and Mali).

Although the interconnectivity of local governments and municipalities across national borders is not a new phenomenon, the interest in these forms of “glocal” action has recently become more prominent. For instance, the relationships between subnational institutions have multiplied through the many initiatives aimed at Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Based on interventions from policy experts, municipal and local government representatives and researchers, this conference aims at assessing existing forms of city-to-city and local government cooperation, recently regrouped under the term of city diplomacy. Among others, the debates will address the following questions and sub-topics, which can guide the presentations:

- A variety of approaches exist to define diplomatic relationships between subnational entities, which partially depend on the administrative and legislative frameworks, enabling and/or limiting municipal and decentralized stakeholders’ action. Can they all be regrouped under the term of city diplomacy?  
- Local stakeholders’ capacities to partake in international political and policy debates are limited by availability of resources, which vary considerably between primary, secondary and smaller cities. Which powerplays exist between cities to partake in international (policy and geopolitical) relations?  
- Thirdly, how does city diplomacy interact with classical forms of state diplomacy: does city diplomacy challenge more conventional forms of state-to-state relationships or can both coexist and work in a complementary way? More particularly, in times of geopolitical tensions, do cities align with the diplomatic posture of the central state or do they dispose of diplomatic autonomy?  
- Finally, who are the stakeholders involved in city diplomacy and how do they interact or even compete with each other? For instance, civil society organizations facilitate or even implement decentralized cooperation projects, while private stakeholders contribute to (infrastructure, service, housing, etc.) projects, which make cities more visible on the international policy and diplomatic scene.

This conference aims to take stock of ongoing debates and initiatives about city diplomacy, especially in Eastern Africa. Based on a multi-stakeholder approach, it will bring together experts from Africa and Europe involved in municipal and decentralized level partnerships to identify challenges of city diplomacy and concrete results and achievements of this action. Specific attention will be paid to empirical research and data on existing forms of city diplomacy and their results. Here, emphasis will be put on the contributions of young scholars, whose research is dedicated to the above-mentioned challenges and opportunities of city diplomacy.

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3 Glocal is the interconnection of global actions and local issues.
Eligibility

The conference aims promoting new research on concrete case studies by young scholars based in Eastern African universities assessing different forms of city diplomacy and decentralized cooperation. Three candidates will be chosen based on the evaluation of short research abstracts. Full papers will be presented during the conference.

What we offer

- The travel costs including flight tickets, accommodation and visa fees will be covered.
- The research papers presented by the young scholars will be discussed by senior experts attending the conference
- Feedback and monitoring to support the candidate throughout the publication process.

Before applying, please take note of the following eligibility criteria:

- You are a PhD candidate or a postdoctoral research fellow based in an Eastern African university
- You have a research background in social science (geography, urban studies, sociology, anthropology, political science, international relations, history etc.), or any other related field.
- You are undertaking research on different forms of city diplomacy including decentralized cooperation in a Sub-Saharan country, that can be presented during the June conference.

Timeline

- Paper submissions are to be sent to the organizers by 6 May 2024.
  - Submissions include a research abstract of 350-500 words and a CV of the candidate.
  - Submissions must be written in English.
  - The submissions are to be sent as a single PDF file to Hector Dubois (afrique@ifri.org).
- The selected candidates will be informed about the results of the selection process by 15 May, 2024.
- The selected candidates will have to submit a research outline of 3 pages to the organizers by 15 June, 2024.

The organizing institutions

Ifri (French Institute of International Relations) is France’s main think tank in international relations, bringing together and connecting different types of actors involved in national and international policy making including academia, public authorities, the private sector and civil society organizations. Since its creation in 2007, the Sub-Saharan Africa Center (SSAC) has built up expertise on the challenges of urban growth in Africa. In May 2022, the SSAC has launched the multi-stakeholder research program “Governing Africa’s Urban Transitions”, which aims at
providing policy-oriented research results on three key sectors of urban governance, including land, mobility and infrastructure. The research is coproduced by the consortium members including experts from academia, the international civil society, multi- and bilateral organizations as well as the private sector.

**UN-Habitat** (UN-Habitat) established by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 19th December 1977 and Headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya. UN-Habitat is the coordinating agency within the United Nations System for human settlement activities and in collaboration with governments is responsible for promoting and consolidating collaboration with all partners, including local authorities, private and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular, Goal 11 of “Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”, as well as the task manager of the human settlements chapter of Agenda 21 and focal point for the monitoring, evaluation and implementation of the New Urban Agenda adopted during the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), in Ecuador, Quito, 2016. UN-Habitat is promoting local and City level diplomacy and Good Governance with participatory approaches and capacity building to Local, National and Regional Governments cutting across its programmatic activities.

**UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments)** Africa is the umbrella organization and the united voice and representative of local governments in Africa. It was founded in 2005 in the City of Tshwane, South Africa as a result of the unification of three continental groups of local governments, namely the African Union of Local Authorities (AULA); the Union des Villes Africaines (UVA); and the Africa Chapter of the Unao dos Ciudades y Capitaes Lusofono Africana, (UCCLAFRICA).

Established as the African section of the world organization UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments), UCLG Africa now boasts a membership of 44 national associations of local governments from all regions of Africa, as well as 2000 cities that have more than 100,000 inhabitants. As such, the organization represents nearly 350 million African citizens. Its headquarters are in the City of Rabat, The Kingdom of Morocco, where it enjoys diplomatic status as a Pan-African International Organization.