
Foreword

For more than two decades, the Sahel and West Africa Club has highlighted the importance of settlement dynamics and in particular its most spectacular manifestation, urbanisation, in order to understand the important role it plays in the economic, social and political transformations in the region. The publication of the *West African Long-Term Perspectives Study* in 1998 was a major contribution towards understanding and anticipating the impact of settlement dynamics in West Africa. More recently, the Club highlighted the central role cities and urban-rural linkages play in agricultural transformation and growth, agro-food value chain development and food security (*Settlement, Market and Food Security*).

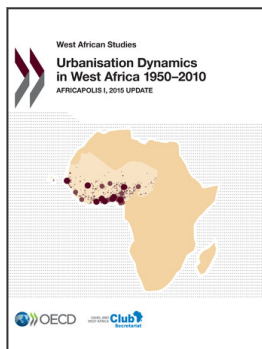
Cities and their inhabitants are increasingly at the heart of development processes in African countries. However, there is still little data on the actual size of West African cities, their number, location, the distances between them, where and how they form and grow. Yet this information is increasingly important in informing a wide range of development policies at the local, national and regional level, such as urban and land planning, public service provision, infrastructure and investment,

decentralisation and spatial development, as well as energy and climate change.

To further develop our multidisciplinary work and to provide a reliable, comparable and homogenous database (available at stats.oecd.org), the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat funded the update of the Africapolis I database which is part of the e-Geopolis programme. e-Geopolis applies a methodology combining satellite imagery and census data to identify, localise and estimate the physical and demographic size of African cities. The 2015 update provides important improvements to data coverage and our understanding of the state of urbanisation and urbanisation dynamics in West Africa. It integrates new census data for 13 countries and more recent high definition aerial images. Although statistical data weaknesses persist, this is undoubtedly the best available picture yet of contemporary urbanisation in West Africa for the period 1950 to 2010.

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