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**MATTERS ARISING IN URBAN GOVERNANCE:
STRUCTURAL ADVERSITIES AND THE VULNERABILITY
OF CITIES IN AFRICA**

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Abstract

The impression given in planning scholarship that the vulnerability of cities is strictly bound with environmental adversities is not necessarily correct. The vulnerability of cities in Africa extends beyond environmental adversities to include structural adversities arising from spatial distortions and disconnects in the form and functions of urban regions. These adversities indicate extroverted space economy. Remarkably the policy instruments of modern urban governance do not seem to contend with these adversities, which are loosely regarded as legacies of colonization. This attitude allows the adversities to remain resilient. They exist as a continuous process that impacts city development, forcing cities in Africa to adopt informal strategies to manage productivity. This process is worrisome because it has the potentials to derail the city-centred paradigm of new regionalism in Africa. As a remedial measure this paper advocates the need to retool the city in Africa.

Keywords: urban governance, space economy, new-regionalism, vulnerability, adversity, planning

1.0 Introduction

The African civilization was led by traditions of culture, which were translated into cities through the instrumentality of liberal arts. By 1800 African civilization already had a long fascinating heritage in city development. The various stories of Arab merchants contained tales of flourishing African cities. These cities grew up in the European medieval period at a time when international trade between the Mediterranean, Europe and the Far East was expanding rapidly (Denyer, 1978). Intellectual explorers rediscovered this rich heritage of African ancestry and according to Davison et al., (1966, 22) reserved it in a cultural movement called *negritude* in order to rescue a main section of humanity from unhappy misunderstanding.

In the fifteenth century during the mercantilist period, contact with European merchants initiated external

interest which influenced trade relations. This manifested changes in the development of African spatial systems at the levels of the city, urban regions and nation-states. At the city level hybrid cities emerged, which do not necessarily resonate with indigenous values, attitudes and institutions. In current dispensation, this category of cities are loosely referred to as 'African cities'. Ideally these hybrid-cities are 'African cities' in the Diaspora in their homeland (Dembele, 1998). These cities better referred to as 'imperial cities' are programmed to respond to external economic policies of extraction. The presence of these cities compels the preference of the expression 'cities in Africa' rather than 'African cities'. These cities contributed to the alteration of the space economy found within the boundaries of nation-state bequeathed by colonialism¹. Indeed imperial cities signalled the first phase of imperial space economy in Africa.

¹Space economy as used here succinctly refers to the expression of the economic system in physical space.

