



# A Growing City

## *Nairobi*

Following its founding in 1902, Nairobi took roughly 40 years to exceed a population of 100 000 people. By independence, 20 years later it had reached around 350 000 people (Olima 2001). Rapidly increasing population has been ongoing since, surpassing one million in the 1980s, two million in the 1990s and now approaching three million residents. While the annual rate of growth has at times exceeded ten per cent, it has more recently decreased to below four per cent per year — still very high by global standards. Nairobi is projected to top 3.8 million by 2015. The footprint of the city's growth can be defined in at least two ways — the official boundaries and the actual changes in settlement, which can be seen in this series of

satellite images. The light purple of the intense urban settlement can be seen steadily growing between 1976 and 2005.

Much of Nairobi's urban footprint is unplanned settlement driven by rapid population growth and urban poverty, among other things. Sprawling informal settlements handicap the city's delivery of social services and negatively impact the quality of life. Informal settlements date to the city's earliest days when European settlers appropriated large tracts of land displacing the local African population with no provision for their resettlement. In the early 1990s, it was determined that over half of the city's population was living in unplanned settlements.