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# Governance for Pro-Poor Urban Development

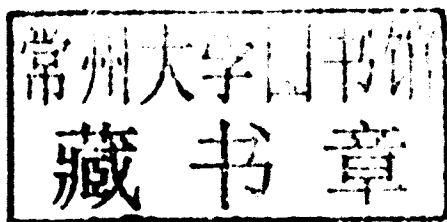
Lessons from Ghana

Franklin Obeng-Odoom

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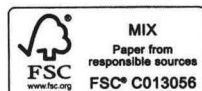
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# Governance for Pro-Poor Urban Development

The world development institutions commonly present 'urban governance' as an antidote for the so-called 'urbanisation of poverty' and 'parasitic urbanism' in Africa. This book is the first comprehensive, in-depth, systematic analysis of the meaning, nature, and effects of 'urban governance' in theory and in practice, with a focus on Ghana, a country widely regarded as an island of good governance in a sea of chaotic governance in the sub-region. The author provides a simple but novel taxonomy of urban governance and applies it to an entire urban system in Africa. It explores, analyses and evaluates the assumptions, mission, and vision of pro-poor urban governance, looking at both the political (democracy and decentralisation) and economic (privatisation and entrepreneurialism) dimensions. This book tests the claims of pro-poor urban governance against the empirical evidence 'on the ground' and shows that, contrary to claims that urban governance is 'developmentalist', in practice, it is a handmaiden of neoliberalism. Demonstrating how urban governance has worsened or failed to address the 'urbanisation of poverty', it also shows that diverse groups and classes experience urban governance differently such that not only are there substantial differences in urban life but also there is pervasive social differentiation in how people access and control urban services and resources.

**Franklin Obeng-Odoom** is an urban researcher at the School of the Built Environment at the University of Technology, Sydney in Australia where he is the Chancellor's Postdoctoral Research Fellow. In January 2013, Franklin was appointed by the International Social Science Council as a World Social Science Fellow for his work on sustainable urbanisation, three years after becoming a Dan David Scholar for 'innovative and interdisciplinary research that cuts across traditional boundaries and paradigms'.

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# Preface

Successive governments in Ghana have embraced urban governance as a direct approach to managing cities. This book sketches the historical and contemporary underpinnings of this form of governance and looks at the nature of urban employment, municipal services, housing, and land. It uses a critical immanent methodology informed by the theoretical work of David Harvey, Manuel Castells, and David Drakakis-Smith, and draws on multiple sources of evidence, including published statistical information, surveys, and official government reports.

The book shows that urban governance has produced mixed, but predominantly inefficient and inequalitarian, results. The private sector has provided more jobs; but these are concentrated in relatively rich urban areas. The success in land management is in terms of input, such as the establishment of more land registries; not outcome in the form of secure and egalitarian land tenure. There are more cars and more options to travel but mobility within cities has reduced and become more dangerous. More water is now produced but less gets to the poor. Waste is better managed but only in rich communities. The private sector has produced more houses; but they are priced beyond the reach of the poor, and, although rental housing is relatively affordable, landlords tend to arbitrarily evict tenants who complain about practices such as underinvestment in essential housing services and increases in rent. In turn, the cities in Ghana have grown more unequal, an outcome which sets in motion forces of circular and cumulative causation.

There is a disjuncture between the mission, vision, and assumptions of urban governance and the conditions 'on the ground'. This book concludes that the underlying reasons for this disjuncture are difficulties in implementing urban governance consistently in practice, problems arising because urban governance has been implemented in practice, tensions that would bedevil most policies which do not address structural issues and restrictive assumptions, and incoherence among the different dimensions of urban governance. These weaknesses in the concept are related to one another and are evident to a large or less extent in different sectors at different times. Recognising this, it is argued that the practices of urban governance have not succeeded for the majority of urbanites and that a preferable policy approach would place primary emphasis on class.

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May, 2013



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Finally, I obtained helpful comments on earlier versions of chapters of this book from the editors and reviewers of *Review of African Political Economy*, *Growth and Change*, *Review of Black Political Economy*, *Norwegian Journal of Geography*, *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development*, and *Journal of Developing Societies* for which I say ‘many thanks’.

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## **Part I**

# **Understanding urban governance and cities**



# 1 Introduction

## The setting

As a continent, Africa has the highest overall urbanisation rate in the world. The greatest tensions arising from urbanisation can also be found there, (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2007). Critics describe urbanisation as ‘parasitic’, ‘premature’, or the ‘migration of poverty’ (e.g., Ravallion *et al.*, 2007; Kinver, 2007), labels which Akin Mabogunje (1968), eminent African urbanist, has interpreted as connoting that urbanisation has outpaced economic development. The World Bank (2000) went as far as claiming that Africa’s urbanisation is runaway, negatively correlated with economic growth, and predominantly driven by strife and tensions in rural areas. This view has prompted some African urban scholars (e.g., Njoh, 2003; Tetteh, 2005; Kessides, 2006) to conduct empirical studies on the economic development–urbanisation nexus. The results of those studies helped to overturn the view that urbanisation in Africa is nebulous or exceptional (see World Bank, 2009a, p. 59).

Also, analyses of local censuses, demographic health survey reports, and ethnographic studies by Deborah Potts (2012a; 2012b; 2012c) show that urbanisation in Africa is not as fast as critics claim. In any case, different definitions of ‘urban’ across Africa, different times of conducting censuses, erratic and lack of censuses for several decades in some African countries raise doubts about claims of a ‘rapid’ urbanisation in Africa. The point is not that there is no expansion of urban settlements. Rather, the urban growth rates in most African countries are generally not higher than the national population growth rates. According to David Satterthwaite (2003; 2010), these statistical setbacks are sometimes connected to conceptual confusions too, such as conflating the urban population growth rate and the rate of urbanisation level. Whatever the cause, the setbacks make some of the population data and projections unreliable, as shown in the detailed discussion of country-specific data (Africapolis Team, 2008; Potts, 2012c) and responses to attempts to defend United Nations (UN) data (Potts, 2012b). Indeed, the doubts raised about the reliability of the basic population data, projections, and depiction of urbanisation in Africa potentially undermine some of the key policy positions in the global reports about ‘rapid urbanisation’ in Africa because a different policy mix is needed to manage the urban population in Africa, if it is growing at a slower rate than the growth rate of the national population, or even

stagnating (Potts, 2009). As with other continents, Africa has its share of urban problems, of course, but an assessment of their character, and potential solutions, must go beyond broad generalisation to a more specific consideration of particular problems, such as poor roads, decrepit houses, and water shortage, in particular countries. Attention must necessarily be given to policy processes, institutional dynamics, and historical peculiarities.

This book is concerned with pro-poor urban development. It uses the concept of 'urban governance' and focuses on the situation in Ghana. Its aim is to analyse, explore, and evaluate the assumptions and mission, vision, and outcomes of urban governance, a concept that has remained difficult to define, measure or evaluate (Stewart, 2006, p. 196). The book conceptualises urban governance as a cluster of ideas, namely decentralisation, entrepreneurialism, and democratisation (Dijk, 2006, p. 56; UN-HABITAT, 2008a). As a political and economic concept, urban governance is supposed to go beyond the state-market framework and produce outcomes that meet the needs of urban citizens. However, this book shows a more complex picture, one which is at variance with the widely touted vision and mission of urban governance. The book exposes the *nature* and *extent* of the disjuncture between the rhetoric of the vision, assumptions, and mission of urban governance, its actual impact, and the conditions 'on the ground'.

This political economy of pro-poor urban governance in Ghana is a particularly interesting focus for three reasons. First, although globally more people live in urban, than in rural, areas, only a few African countries have experienced this 'urban age' phenomenon. Ghana is one of only four countries in West Africa or one of twenty-one in Africa to have a predominantly urban population (Department of Economic and Social Affairs [DESA], 2009). It is important to understand this spatial change and grasp its problems and prospects (Myers, 2011; Njoh, 2012). Second, within Ghana, knowledge of the impact of national and urban policies on cities is undeveloped, prompting the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development in Ghana to commission a study that led to the preparation of the first National Urban Policy<sup>1</sup> (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2010). Therefore, a book on urban governance and pro-poor urban development in Ghana is timely. It can contribute to the effort which the Government of Ghana is making to better understand the impact of policies on cities. Third, there is a popular belief among the international development agencies that the problems of countries in the Global South arise mainly from 'poor governance', therefore, developed countries have given a significant amount of technical and financial aid to these countries to improve the processes and structures of governance (Cities Alliance, 2008; Blundo and Le Meur, 2008; Chandler, 2012). From this angle, Ghana is often praised as a pace setter in Africa (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). It has consistently ranked in the top ten countries on the Mo Ibrahim Governance Index and, in sub-Saharan Africa, it is widely believed to be one of the 'big four'<sup>2</sup> (Naudé, 2011). Thus, it is important to consider governance in Ghana, especially at the urban level. It is this combination of local, regional, and global reasons that makes a book of urban governance in Ghana timely.

This is not the first book on cities in Ghana, of course. However, it departs from existing urban research in Ghana in three ways. First, it emphasises political economic processes, which require that the study of urban policies be situated in the context of broader socio-economic analysis. Unlike most of the studies on cities in Ghana which are written from the perspective of either *humanistic* geography (e.g., Oteng-Ababio, 2011) or planning (e.g., Boamah *et al.*, 2012) – perspectives that consider the ‘urban’ without placing central importance on the underlying structural socio-economic processes – this book is written from a political economic perspective. It is a perspective that contrasts with an orthodox, neoclassical economic framework based on the use of the individual as the unit of analysis, restrictive assumptions such as perfect information, an emphasis on the price mechanism as the best means of allocating resources, and a methodology of modelling and formal statistical analysis. The political economic approach adopted in this book emphasises evolution in historical time, distributive equity, and analysis of how institutions of varying degrees of power interact with the economic system to produce different social, political, economic, and environmental outcomes (Stilwell, 1992a, pp. 16–17; O’Hara, 2001, pp. 861–862; Keen, 2003; Anderson, 2004, pp. 141–144; Stilwell, 2006, pp. 4–5; Butler *et al.*, 2009, pp. 112–114). It does not insist all factors must necessarily be precisely estimated to be deemed ‘proved’ or established. Historical accounts from sources as diverse as newspapers and press statements, case study analysis and qualitative descriptions can be used, as many socio-economic phenomena do not lend themselves easily to quantification. Or, to use the words of WB Cameron (1963, p. 13), ‘[n]ot everything that can be counted counts. Not everything that counts can be counted.’

That approach is built on institutional political economy (see Sawers, 1984b, pp. 3–17; Stilwell, 2001, pp. 1206–1212). It is an orientation that emphasises the economy and society as an interlocking and interdependent system (Stilwell, 2000, pp. 15–16). It provides alternative explanations to inform practical socio-economic policies and strategies (O’Hara, 2001, pp. 861–862). As with other currents flowing into modern political economy, an influence from the Marxian tradition is evident. In practice, institutional and Marxian perspectives intermingle in political economic analysis, especially when applied to the study of cities and regions (Stilwell, 1992a). Insights are also drawn from different academic disciplines such as land economy, urban economics, and geography to analyse the *material lives* of urban citizens. That does not mean that ‘immaterial’ factors such as culture are disregarded. However, unlike cultural approaches that perceive ‘social or cultural discourses’ as the sole or main drivers of the economic, the approach used in this book regards the material and immaterial, cultural and economic, political and non-political processes as co-constitutive of the urban experience (Ribera-Fumaz, 2009, pp. 454–455). In short, the method is one of critical engagement with immanentist approaches to the study of the urban which look at the urban as formed by various forces, the dominant of which are the dynamics of capital accumulation (Karaman, 2012). Therefore, epistemologically, this study is different from most of the urban research on Ghana.



Another theme also distinguishes this book from previous urban studies in Ghana. The previous research practice has been to conduct stand-alone case studies of one phenomenon or another, one city then another, typically using interviews (see, for example, Asiedu and Agyei-Mensah, 2008; Asiedu and Arku, 2009). In contrast, this book examines the different sectors of the urban economy and society, ranging from employment, poverty, and inequality through transport, waste management, water delivery, land, urban housing, and politics. The unit of analysis is ‘the urban’, not any one particular city. The ‘inter-sectorial style’ is appropriate because every sector in the city relates to others. And, analysing issues common to urban areas as a whole helps to see the big picture which has eluded some of the existing research. The book takes an integrated perspective of ‘the urban’, while at the same time seeking to retain the nuances relevant to the various sectors. These different scales of examination are knit together in a *comparative analysis* of urban problems and policy in Africa (Chapter 10) in order to move from depth to breadth of analysis. While the primary focus is on the Ghanaian experience, the book makes it possible to see the broader patterns of the tensions and contradictions in urban governance in Africa.

Finally, this book prioritises the ‘social justice’ value in social science research which, according to Myers (2011, pp. 105–106), gets ‘much less critical attention’ in urban studies in Africa. It analyses the so-called trade-offs between equity and efficiency. It raises questions about whether urban governance leads to either efficient and equitable outcomes or whether it can lead to a lose–lose outcome of worsening efficiency and equity. Alternatively, it finds out: does urban governance lead to improved efficiency and loss of equity? Or, is it rather that urban governance has led to improvement in equity and a loss of efficiency? Studying these dynamics – or ‘the big trade-off’, to borrow from the terminology of Arthur Okun (1975), the American economist, is particularly important for urban research in Ghana because all the main national policies, such as *Vision 2020*, the *Interim poverty reduction strategy paper* and the *Poverty reduction strategy papers I and II*, claim to seek a process of socially just national and urban economic development (Government of Ghana, 1995; 2000; 2003; 2005). From that perspective, the absence of a focus on social justice in the existing research on cities (e.g., Møller-Jensen and Knudsen, 2008; Karley, 2009) is a major deficit, warranting the writing of this book.

The book is particularly influenced by the urban political economy of David Harvey (mainly his analysis of the economic interests shaping cities), Manuel Castells (particularly the class nature of state intervention and contradictions generated when the state responds to the inadequacies of a market economy by seeking to produce the means of collective consumption), and David Drakakis-Smith (especially his work on how contemporary urbanism is influenced by colonialism and imperialism).

The evidence that informs the analysis comes from three main sources. One, information from different statistical compendiums prepared, among others, by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), the ministries, departments, and agencies (MMDAs), the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) and the international