



THE NORDIC
AFRICA INSTITUTE
NORDISKA AFRIKAINSTITUTET

Visions of urban modernity and the shrinking of public space

Challenges for street work in African cities



NAI Policy Notes 2020:2
Ilda Lindell
Onyanta Adama

© The authors and Nordiska Afrikainstitutet/The Nordic Africa Institute, March 2020

The opinions expressed in this volume are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI).



You can find this, and all other titles in the NAI policy notes series, in our digital archive Diva, www.nai.diva-portal.org, where they are also available as open access resources for any user to read or download at no cost.

Rights and Permissions

This work is available under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 license (CC BY 3.0). You are free to copy, distribute, transmit, and adapt this work under the following conditions:



Attribution. If you cite this work, the attribution must include the name(s) of the author(s), the work's title and

copyright notices.

Translations. If you create a translation of this work, please add the following disclaimer along with the attribution: This translation was not created by The Nordic Africa Institute and should not be considered an official Nordic Africa Institute translation. The Nordic Africa Institute shall not be liable for any content or error in this translation.

Adaptations. If you create an adaptation of this work, please add the following disclaimer along with the attribution: This is an adaptation of an original work by The Nordic Africa Institute. Views and opinions expressed in the adaptation are the sole responsibility of the author or authors of the adaptation and are not endorsed by The Nordic Africa Institute.

Third-party content. The Nordic Africa Institute does not necessarily own each component of the content contained within the work. The Nordic Africa Institute therefore does not warrant that the use of any third-party-owned individual component or part contained in the work will not infringe on the rights of those third parties.

Please address all queries on rights and licenses to The Nordic Africa Institute, PO Box 1703, SE-751 47 Uppsala, Sweden, e-mail: publications@nai.uu.se.

ISSN 1654-6695
ISBN 978-91-7106-863-7



Cover photo: Street vendors in Maputo. Photo: Ilda Lindell.

Visions of urban modernity and the shrinking of public space

Challenges for street work in African cities

Making cities inclusive is one of the goals of Agenda 2030, and access to public spaces is identified as an important sub-goal. However, in urban Africa, access by street vendors and other marginalised groups to public spaces seems to be on the decline. This policy note discusses why this is so, what processes lie behind the decline and what the effects are for groups that depend on public space for survival.

ILDA LINDELL and ONYANTA ADAMA, STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY

Ongoing interventions to modernise African cities are based on ideas of “successful” and competitive urbanism derived from beyond the continent. Such interventions are most keenly felt in central city areas, with increased regulation of public spaces and redevelopment projects that transform the physical and social composition of city centres. They often seek to create spaces for leisure and consumption for better-off groups, while at the same time erasing visible signs of poverty and informality. However, in urban Africa, large and growing numbers of people depend on informality for survival. Informal employment is estimated at 76 per cent of total employment in urban areas; and in the service sector this figure is even higher. Women are generally overrepresented and informal work is particularly

high among young people and the elderly (95 per cent and above) (ILO, 2018). For these groups, public spaces in central city areas are more than sites of leisure: they constitute a critical livelihood resource.

This policy note discusses the strategies used to remove or control actors and activities perceived as “illegitimate” in urban spaces. It also looks at how the targeted groups experience and respond to these developments. It is based on research findings and experiences from three capital cities – Abuja, Kampala and Maputo.

Abuja

In Abuja, Nigeria’s capital city, the original master plan – commissioned by the federal government and produced by the American firm of International Planning



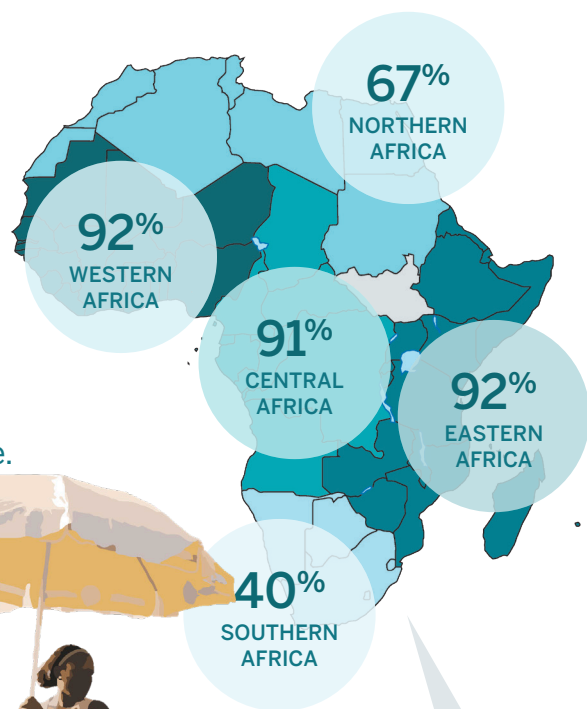
Street vendors in downtown Maputo prior to evictions in March 2020.

Photo: Ilda Lindell

Close to 9 out of 10 jobs in Africa are informal

Informal employment is the main source of employment in Africa, accounting for 86 per cent of all employment, or 72 per cent, excluding agriculture.

Source: ILO, 2018.



In Africa, informal employment is a greater source of employment for **women (90%)** than for **men (83%)**

Share of informal employment in total employment. Regional differences across Africa are large. For example, the share of informal employment in Southern Africa is 40%, less than half of the average in Africa (86%) and far below the world average (61%).

What is an informal job/employment?
 For a job to be considered as informal, the employment relationship should not be subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits (advance notice of dismissal, severance pay, paid annual or sick leave, etc).
 Employers and own-account workers are also considered part of the informal sector when the primary objective of their enterprise is to generate employment and incomes to themselves and their co-workers. Typically, they are operating at a low level of organization, on a small scale and with little or no division between labour and capital as factors of production. Source: ILO, 2018.

Associates – defined right from the outset the relationship between the state and street vendors. The plan, highly influenced by ideals of modernity, aimed to project a particular aesthetic and image of Abuja to a global audience. Accused of littering the streets and disrupting traffic, street vendors are seen as inimical to the dream of a clean, beautiful and well-ordered capital city. The need to adhere to the master plan is used to justify the frequent eviction of street vendors. The drive towards the privatisation of public space is further limiting the amount of public space available to street vendors. In addition, the government resorts to a juridical approach to regain control over public space. The Abuja

Environmental Protection Board (AEPB) Act No. 10 of 1997, which prohibits littering and prescribes penalties for offenders, is used to justify the everyday harassment of, and violence against, vendors. The AEPB task force, a unit made up of enforcement agents and police officers, is largely responsible for the violence. The labelling of street vendors as “terrorists” further legitimises the use of violence.

With the street an indispensable resource of income, vendors in Abuja have adopted a range of individual tactics to maintain their access to public space. Many rely on mobility to avoid or minimise encounters with enforcement agents, or else operate in prohibited spac-

es in the evenings, when the agents are absent. Informal relations are useful for dealing with specific challenges, such as new government restrictions. Street vendors also resort to giving bribes to secure protection from harassment and arrest.

Age and gender shape the activities, experiences and tactics of vendors. Women and children tend to trade in low-value goods. Girls and young women are often mobile and tend to operate in highly visible spaces. These spatial tactics make them more susceptible to harassment. Older women operate in less visible and relatively more stable spaces, are less mobile and tend to rely on informal relations and networks, rather than on spatial tactics. Collectively organised action is rare and tends to be in response to specific and immediate problems. Furthermore, the tactics adopted by vendors are defensive, and thus may not be useful in winning them access to new spaces or increasing their rights.

Kampala

In 2010, after the ruling party lost the Kampala mayoral elections to the opposition party, the central government enacted a new law that effectively recentralised political authority over the capital, through the creation of the Kampala City Council Authority (KCCA). The new law gave considerable powers to an executive director appointed by the president and to the central government's minister for Kampala; meanwhile, the

powers of the elected councillors and the mayor were considerably circumscribed. The KCCA embarked on an ambitious agenda to modernise the city, to put an end to the “lawlessness” of street vending and restore “sanity” to public spaces in central Kampala. Street vendors were described as illegal and a threat to public order. The 2013 Public Order Management Act and a new strategic plan emphasised regulation and enforcement, and legitimised successive eviction campaigns from 2011 onwards. These campaigns – ordered by the executive wing of the KCCA and the minister for Kampala – involved the confiscation of goods and mass imprisonment, and led to some fatalities. This all generated unrest among the vendors and sparked clashes with enforcement officers. It also heightened tensions among the political elites, not least between central and locally elected representatives.

Initially, the thousands of evicted vendors were instructed by the KCCA and the minister for Kampala to “go back to their stalls in the markets”. However, many had no stalls to return to, and the available stalls were too expensive. The KCCA's strategy evolved to one of (re)building “modern markets” in Kampala's suburbs, mainly with funding from international development banks, to accommodate the evictees. Such markets would both facilitate the taxation of former street vendors and potentially improve their working conditions. However, enclosed by market walls and in peripheral



View over Kampala with the skyline of the Central Business District. The first eviction campaign in 2011, affected thousands of street vendors operating in this district.

Photo: Andrew Regan

locations, the vendors reported loss of customers and income. They also complained of inflated stall rents and operation costs, and even of repression and brutality by KCCA-appointed market managers, who reportedly abolished vendors' associations. As a result, vendors abandoned these markets and many returned to the streets.

The modernisation agenda has also involved the demolition of informal markets in central Kampala. Parkyard Market had provided livelihoods for thousands of people for many years. Declared illegal by the KCCA, the market was demolished in 2017 and vendors' merchandise was destroyed or plundered. A private company is redeveloping the area into a "modern shopping and sports complex", where evicted vendors will have no place. The demolition has had a great impact on those vendors affected: some can no longer afford house rents or schooling for their children; others have moved to their villages; many refer to declining health and increasing deaths, particularly among the elderly and the sick. Ability to cope was reportedly lowest among women, the elderly and the poorest. Even among those who once had sizeable operations at Parkyard, business has not recovered almost three years on. A group of evictees has appealed to the courts, demanding financial compensation; but vendors' resistance has been weak and divided, with many claiming that the market representatives gave in to the private developer.

Maputo

In Maputo, the city authorities have consistently regarded street vending as a nuisance and have often intervened to restrict or eliminate such activities. The city centre has been a particular target for such interventions. During the 2000s, successive campaigns sought to remove all street vendors from the city centre; but these campaigns reportedly failed.

The case of Maputo differs substantially from those of the other two cities, with its history of two decades of collective organisation. An association was created in the early 2000s with the aim of protecting vending spaces in the city. The association grew rapidly, established committees in many markets in the city, and eventually extended its reach to street vendors. In the early years, relations between the association and the city authorities were very antagonistic. But the influence of the association has gradually increased. Claiming to represent many thousands of vendors in the city (and beyond), the association's demands can no longer be dismissed. The interviewed leaders explained how they consciously built close relations with Frelimo, the political party

that has ruled both Maputo and the nation since independence, exchanging political allegiance for a measure of protection against the hostility of the city council. The association has been able to deter the destruction of some informal markets, and in 2008 it pushed through an agreement with the city council, whereby temporary authorisation was granted for street vending in a section of downtown Maputo. For more than ten years, over 6,000 vendors occupied the pavements of the designated avenues. This was possible through the sustained collective organising of vendors. However, despite this considerable achievement, the authorities deployed the security forces and initiated the forced removal of vendors from downtown Maputo on the 13th of March 2020. This caused widespread unrest: many vendors refused to abandon their spaces, rioted and besieged most of the downtown area. A number of vendors were jailed. The Municipal Council claimed that it has prepared an alternative space for the vendors in a suburban area. But the angered vendors either refute the existence of such a space or claim that it is not viable for their businesses (for example in terms of conditions and customer flow). The vendors' association has been unable to protect its members from eviction. At the time of writing, tensions between resisting vendors and security forces continue. The long period of relatively undisturbed access to public space by street vendors in parts of central Maputo appears to be over.

Conclusions

The three cities highlighted are experiencing increasing attempts to transform and control public spaces in central city areas. There is an increase in the regulation of public space, through tougher enforcement of existing laws and the passing of new laws that criminalise street vending. Evictions of street vendors, usually performed by specially created task forces, have intensified. These groups are losing access to work space in the city centres and are being pushed out to the urban peripheries. Consequently, they are losing income and livelihoods, and many are experiencing a deepening poverty. Women, children and the elderly are among the most vulnerable. But other groups are also potentially affected: for example, public servants who earn modest salaries often depend on cheap meals and goods provided by street vendors in downtown areas.

However, these trends are complex and their implications multifaceted. First, they involve varied configurations of actors – such as local and central government agencies, private investors, international development institutions, street workers' associations, etc. – each with its

own agenda and concerns. While these actors may differ greatly in terms of power and resources, collaboration or conflict between them is not predetermined – as is illustrated above by the story of tensions among state actors in Kampala, or the alliance between a street workers’ association and the ruling party in Maputo. One emerging trend, however, is the increasing involvement in the refashioning of city centres by central state actors, who sometimes bypass (locally elected) city authorities, as in the case of Kampala. This recentralisation of political authority constitutes a reversal of earlier decentralisation reforms and changes the conditions for “participatory planning” emphasised in Agenda 2030.

Secondly, the discussed developments are driven by diverse and tangled logics: concerns with economic growth expected to trickle down to the wider population some time down the line; the profit interests of investors and public officials; the political agendas of politicians; the aesthetic imperatives of fulfilling global urban ideals; attempts to increase tax revenues and, at times, “developmental” goals – as illustrated by the creation of new markets for evicted street vendors in Kampala. The outcomes of these diverse logics and agendas for the common good, however, are far from straightforward. Mechanisms for income redistribution are often weak, as is the accountability of public agencies and of investors in contexts of limited or nominal democracy. Even the above-mentioned “developmental” intervention failed to improve the livelihood of vendors, as this was secondary to the primary goal of removing them from the streets.

Street workers respond to the increasing control and transformation of public spaces in diverse ways. They use a range of individual tactics to access valuable livelihood spaces and to negotiate access to new spaces with diverse actors. However, such individual tactics are limited by what they can achieve, and their ability to cope with spatial restrictions varies according to gender, age, contacts, etc. Collective organization may provide provisional access to valuable central city spaces, as the Maputo case illustrates. However, street vendors’ associations often lack the political clout (or autonomy) to ultimately oppose evictions, and many associations cease to operate after displacement, due to the dispersal of their members.

The declining access by marginalised groups to public spaces undermines current global goals of making cities inclusive. It also works against the attainment of other goals in Agenda 2030, such as the reduction of inequalities, poverty and hunger, and the promotion of decent work and gender equality. As street work is the

only source of income for diverse groups, the elimination of public livelihood spaces has a devastating effect on the weakest (the poor, the elderly, women, disabled people, children, etc.), and also wrecks the hopes and dreams of young men and women, who are then pushed into criminality, sex work or international migration. The shrinking of livelihood opportunities through spatial exclusion stands in contrast to the expansion of affluent redevelopments and consumption spaces, amplifying feelings of alienation and fuelling social unrest in many cities.

Redirecting urban development in Africa towards the “inclusive city” requires a major turn-around in urban policy and practice. Narrow urban priorities that emphasise economic growth, competitiveness and urban aesthetics must give way to a genuine concern for (and consideration of) opportunities for marginalised groups and urban majorities. This means putting an end to strategies of spatial displacement, enclosure and criminalisation of street workers, and developing policies that support ingenious solutions to urban livelihood challenges, through proper and meaningful dialogue with these populations. This requires true recognition of these groups as real citizens with rights, needs and aspirations, and of the important contribution they make to local societies and economies.

This policy note is based on the research project “The demise of the informal city? Economic growth and street work in urban Africa”, funded by the Swedish Research Council (grant no 2015-03474). For more information and publications, go to: humangeo.su.se/urbanafrika. ■

Recommended readings

Adama, O. (2020). Abuja is not for the poor: Street vending and the politics of public space. *Geoforum* 109: 14-23.

ILO (2018). *Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture*. Geneva: ILO.

Lindell, I (2019) Re-spatializing urban informality: reconsidering the spatial politics of street work in the Global South, *International Development Planning Review*, 41 (1): 3-22.

Lindell, I; Ampaire, C and Byerley A (2019) Governing urban informality: re-working spaces and subjects in Kampala, Uganda. *International Development Planning Review*, 41 (1): 63-84.

Lindell, I (Ed) (2010) *Africa’s Informal workers: collective agency, alliances and transnational organizing in urban Africa*. London & Uppsala: Zed Books & The Nordic Africa Institute.

Skinner, C.; Reed, S. and Harvey, J. (2018). *Supporting livelihoods in public space: a toolkit for local authorities*. WIEGO: Manchester.



About this policy note

Making cities inclusive is one of the goals of Agenda 2030, and access to public spaces is identified as an important sub-goal. However, in urban Africa, access by street vendors and other marginalised groups to public spaces seems to be on the decline. This policy note discusses why this is so, what processes lie behind the decline and what the effects are for groups that depend on public space for survival.



About our policy notes

NAI Policy Notes is a series of short briefs on relevant topics, intended for strategists, analysts and decision makers in foreign policy, aid and development. They aim to inform public debate and generate input into the sphere of policymaking. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute.



About the authors

Ida Lindell and **Onyanta Adama** are both researchers at the Department of Human Geography at Stockholm University and alumni researchers of the Nordic Africa Institute.

Lindell's research is concerned with urban change in the context of global processes and how these processes are experienced and lived in local urban contexts. Adama's research is primarily concerned with urban governance processes and service delivery in African cities.



About the institute

The Nordic Africa Institute conducts independent, policyrelevant research, provides analysis and informs decisionmaking, with the aim of advancing research-based knowledge of contemporary Africa. The institute is jointly financed by the governments of Finland, Iceland and Sweden.