

Chapter 20

Informal Sector Operations and the Environment: Reconnoitering the African Urban Space for Sustainable Urban Stewardship

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ABSTRACT

Using case studies from Cairo, Harare, Kigali, and Addis Ababa, this study seeks to disentangle the relationship that exists between the informal sector and the urban environments in Africa. It argues that there are two sides to the coin of the informal sector: the informal sector as a major contributor to urban environmental pollution (land, water, air, and sound), and the sector works as a “cleanser” given its ability to re-use the materials that the formal sector has disgorged. The study defines the inputs, processes, throughputs, and outputs in the sector in keeping with the debates of informal sector contributor to poor environmental management and the informal sector cleanser of the potentially polluted environment. In light of these debates, the authors see the extant imperative of balancing between the two debates in order to inform the urban environmental policy. Overall, with improved technology or appropriate technology coupled with rigorous environmental stewardship campaigns, it is possible to create safer cities where brown, green, and red issues are balanced out.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to unravel how the informal sector in developing countries affects urban environments. Two arguments are presented in this chapter on the relationship between the informal sector and the urban environment. On one hand it is presented that the informal sector is a major cause of urban environmental pollution – land, water, air and sound. On the other hand, the informal sector is applauded as a cleanser of the urban environment due to its capabilities in re-using waste materials

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disgorged from the formal sector. The informal sector has different processes and typologies which should at first be understood so as to raise the two central debates of this chapter. This understanding will help in coming up with measures and strategies of combating pollution and other challenges brought about by the informal sector. The chapter suggests that the two debates central to this chapter should be considered and used to inform urban environmental policy formulation because they are both real in Africa's urban areas. As a recommendation argument we argue that through the use of applicable and sophisticated technologies parallel to environmental stewardship campaigns it is possible to create safer cities where the formal and the informal sectors interact. Case studies are drawn from cities in Africa: Cairo, Harare, Kigali and Addis Ababa. These cities are from across the African continent and they are good examples for the informal sector and environmental stewardship connection.

The study is organised as follows:

- *Introduction:* Which sets the tone of the study.
- *Theoretical Framework and Literature Review:* Keys concepts and arguments on the informal sector are provided which this chapter is based on.
- *Research Design and Methods:* Research and data collection methods used for this chapter are discussed and defined.
- *Study Results:* Which provides the Case Studies from Selected African Cities: this section of the study looks into the effects of the informal sector on the environment in Addis Ababa, Cairo, Harare and Kigali.
- *Discussion:* On this section research findings or results of the study in line with the arguments of this chapter are discussed which looks into the effects of the informal sector on the urban environment.
- *Practical and Policy Options:* Of which recommendations are stated which aims at improving the nature of the informal sector in line with environmental considerations.
- *Conclusion:* Which assesses and concludes the major debates and findings of this chapter.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The chapter is based on the relationship that exists between the informal sector and the urban environments in Africa. It argues that there are two sides to the coin of the informal sector. On the one hand, there is a debate that the informal sector is a major contributor to urban environmental pollution – land, water, air and sound. Yet, the other debate is that the sector works as a ‘cleanser’ given its ability to re-use the materials that the formal sector has disgorged as waste.

Existing studies in Africa (e.g. Ojong, 2011; Muzvidziwa, 2000, Fonchingong, 2005) observe the rampancy and commonality of informal sector operations in developing countries. It is also a livelihood coping strategy by the majority of the poor who have migrated from the countryside. The informal sector has been defined by the anthropologist Keith Hart (Hart, 1973:61-89) as “the activities outside wage employment but involved in a wide variety of production and service activities that lie outside the view of official statistics” (Simon, 2007: page number). Harding and Jenkins (1989: 3) also define the informal sector as the “hidden economy”. The sector, being the ‘leeward side’ of the formal sector traverses all the functions defining the city including entertainment, housing and accommodation, transport, commerce and trade, to name but these few. What remains unstudied are the implications borne by the informal sector on the environment including pollution to the environment and its working against the

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