**Connect rather than neglect: Reframing Ghana’s urban WASH policies for informal settlements in support of its ‘rising through cities’ aspiration**

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**Abstract**:

Ghana is perhaps one of few African countries that are experiencing steady economic growth through the development of cities. Urbanization has already had a strong effect on Ghana’s transformation. Since 1984, annual GDP has grown rapidly, averaging 5.7 percent. This rapid economic growth has resulted in a reduction in poverty in both rural and urban but not without the consequences of unguided urban expansion; about 40% of the population in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area live in informal settlements. There is limited access to/ poor quality of basic services and affordable quality housing, and a general lack of fit-for-purpose urban policies. The leadership of Ghana acknowledges that if unaddressed these consequences could create ‘a grave danger’ for the country, and its ‘Rising through cities in Ghana’ aspiration.

In this paper, however, we observe that these higher-level acknowledgement and aspiration are not touching the lives of millions of informal dwellers in Accra and other cities across Ghana. Using the example of WASH (water supply, sanitation and hygiene) sector policies, we reveal a systematic neglect of the urban poor in these policies and actions. As in most developing counties, Ghana’s urban sector policies favour the neoliberal subjects, i.e. those who can pay for the services on offer. As dwellers of informal settlements typically fail to pay for services, they do not themselves become neoliberal subjects, resulting in their exclusion from having legitimate access to the planned services. We present initial findings of the nature and extent of this neglect by drawing on detailed analysis of two informal communities in Accra – Madina Zongo and Gbegbeyise. We find that the access to/ quality of WASH provision is influenced by the lack of official urban polities and ways in which the ‘real world’ of informal urban governance improvises alternative solutions that are sub-optimal in quantity or quality with far reaching negative consequences.

We therefore propose that the framing of WASH sector policies, and indeed all urban sector policies, that underpin the visionary ‘Rising through cities in Ghana’ are best approached from the viewpoint of connection rather than neglect of the urban poor. The concluding section examine the prospects for making urban governance more connected to the informal communities by incorporating the prevailing informal governance structures and processes into the official structures and processes via development coalition.