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Managing African cities

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INTRODUCTION

A Research project on 'Institutional Innovations in the Management of Secondary Cities in Sub-Saharan Africa' is being carried out by UNCHS (Habitat). The research is based on four case study cities chosen in different sub-Saharan African countries: Newl in Nigeria; Bonoua in Cote d'Ivoire; Eldoret in Kenya; and Masvingo, in Zimbabwe.

The study focuses on two general issues. The first is related to decentralization and secondary city development policies in Africa. Recent reviews of the performance of urban development policies aimed at redressing the problem of urban primacy (growth poles, services centres, rural oriented policies partially aimed at discouraging high rates of rural-to-urban migration, etc.) have not been encouraging. Secondary cities have not attracted as much economic activity as originally intended by policy makers, nor have they exhibited much internal dynamism in terms of management. Very often, the above policies, while aiming at enhancing the role of secondary cities in national development, have, unfortunately, tended to ignore the urban institutional management dimension. Thus, urban management, already weak in many capital cities, has deteriorated even more in many secondary cities of sub-Saharan Africa.

The second issue is related specifically to African cities' urban management. In this respect, the research aimed at identifying, in the current economic crisis affecting most of sub-Saharan Africa (which has reduced the capacity of Local government to deal effectively with urban management tasks), all actors who, in many cities and towns, have had to adopt a range of survival strategies (ref.1), and who, in doing so, have filled the gap left by formal Local Government. These survival strategies have been devised in the context of what Goran Hyden (ref.2) has termed the "economy of affection", which seems to regulate inter-private relationships, but also private-public and, sometimes, public-public relationships in sub-Saharan Africa. Hyden's "economy of affection" refers to a pre-capitalistic way of production which, when applied in a modern context of public administration, creates what has been called the "soft state".

Most of the recent attempts to explain the deterioration in the urban management capacity of sub-Saharan Africa have assumed that existing administrative and management systems are appropriate and have, therefore, not ventured to question their relevance. Even at a more general administrative level, it has been assumed that the management of a complex economy which is internationally linked with other economies, requires an efficient 'rational bureaucracy'. Only a few authors have questioned the transferability of western management traditions to the African context (ref.3).

Thus, it is possible that one of the reasons accounting for the poor urban management performance in sub-Saharan Africa is the failure to incorporate indigenous patterns of management within the modern rational bureaucratic systems imported from the west. Although it is not possible to authenticate, this loose hypothesis was one of the ideas which motivated the study. The prevalence of traditional and community-based ways of organization in the provision of urban services, found in the case study cities, suggests that indigenous patterns of management inherited from the past are very much alive and should be taken advantage of.

Our concern in analyzing the management of secondary cities in Africa was to obtain further empirical evidence on the existing two parallel systems, that is the 'formal institutional' system derived from the western management tradition, on the one hand, and, on the other, the 'African traditional' system of managing human settlements. In some parts of Africa, the latter appears to be a very rich tradition, organized according to different ecological systems and ethnic groups. This traditional way of managing human settlements through kingdoms, chieftaincies, age groups etc., appears not to have been completely replaced by the modern rational bureaucratic system, but only put aside and, when the economic crisis made the scarce capacities of local governments even more ineffective, many of what we have earlier called 'survival strategies' were organized following the traditional ethnic institutional framework of management.

On this basis, we attempted to identify the urban management functions carried out by the present formal local government, on the one hand, and, on the other, those functions which are carried out, as 'survival strategy', by both formal and informal traditional and community-based organizations.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Of all the four case studies examined, Nnewi (Nigeria) revealed the most substantive participation by traditional and non-formal community-based organizations. Of particular significance is the persistence of customary systems of land tenure, although this has become increasingly mixed with informal land markets. Formal urban local government is not as effective as in Kenya and Zimbabwe and a very significant proportion of urban services is provided by traditional institutions, individuals and non-formal community-based institutions. The actors identified and their urban management activities were as follows. (1) Traditional Political/Administrative Power Structures (Chieftaincies and Development Unions based on the four traditional urban quarters). These are involved in customary land allocation, organization of traditional peri-urban periodic markets; and facilitation of participation in community development. (2) Development Associations, whose accomplished tasks include construction of the following: a post office, a high school, a civic centre, a water supply system, a general hospital, public toilets and a market. (3) Community Groups and Individuals, who are involved in the provision and/or maintenance of the following: water supply (private boreholes), electricity (private generators), refuse removal, roads and neighbourhood security. (4) Individual Industrial Proprietors, who are involved in the provision and/or maintenance of the following: access roads, water, electricity and refuse removal. (5) Churches, which, until 1974, built and managed 30 primary and 2 secondary schools.

Probably because of the French colonial tradition of strong central government, and because of the small size of the case study town (20,000 people), Bonoua (Cote d'Ivoire) has preserved an almost intact traditional structure of managing both the community and the urban fabric. Practically, the formal local government institutional framework only dates back to 1980, while, since 1965, Bonoua was a sous-prefecture - central government's administrative centre in the region. At the beginning of the 1960s, central government abolished all the traditional chieftaincies, but, in reality, their existence continued to be the engine of development, mostly

in secondary centres. Until 1965, Bonoua was an Abouré centre (with most of the population coming from Ghana and mainly belonging to the Akan ethnic group), the most powerful kingdom in the region. The traditional structure organizes space within the town (on the basis of wards) as well as private space within the compounds. With the arrival of other ethnic groups, after some economic activities were developed in the town, the foreign groups (Mossi from Burkina, other groups from Mali, Guinea, Nigeria, Ghana, etc.) organized themselves through a 'traditional chief', accepting that the chief of the Mossi would represent all the groups of strangers within the Abouré royal court. The royal court and the chieftaincies have complete control over the population of the town. They act as a judiciary in cases of conflict and exercise control on people's movements within the town. The socio-political traditional structure, among other activities, has collected money and built the following: the house for the representative of central government in the town; 48 classes in primary schools; the medical doctor's house; and a ward hotel to accommodate officials visiting the town.

The case study of Eldoret (Kenya) revealed that traditional political and administrative structures have hardly survived within urban areas and that urban management is predominantly organized on the basis of formal local government. Existing non-formal participants in management are largely community-based, rather than traditional in origin and character. The following non-formal participants in urban management were identified. (1) Area Development Committees (incorporating traditional village elders), which are largely involved in community mobilization and provision of some services such as roads, lights, water and sanitation, as well as in the subdivision of informal settlements. (2) Women's Groups, organized on neighbourhood, ethnic or religious basis, which are predominantly involved in the construction of residential and commercial buildings for rental and in a wide range of commercial and small-scale industrial, income-generating enterprises. (3) Cooperative Housing Societies and Land Buying Companies, which are involved, in the acquisition, subdivision and development of land for purposes of both residential and community facilities. (4) Religious/Church Organizations, which are predominantly involved in the running of social services, including pre-primary schools, schools for the disabled, adult literacy classes, feeding programmes for school children, as well as the provision of some physical infrastructure, including water and sanitation; (5) Informal 'Planners' and 'Surveyors' who, in conjunction with the Physical Planning Department, offer

cheap services in surveying and planning work as an input into the production of 'advisory physical development plans' for informal settlements; (6) Individuals and Community Groups, who are involved in fund raising through harambee for community development purposes, provision of neighbourhood security and of potable water kiosks; (7) Informal Sector Artisans (Fundis), who are involved in the provision of public passenger transport (matatus), small-scale manufacturing and repair services (jua kali enterprises) and house construction; (8) Informal Refuse Collectors, who are engaged in scavenging of waste paper and bottles for sale.

The main impression emerging from the case study of Masvingo (Zimbabwe) is that Zimbabwean secondary towns are managed by robust and relatively efficient urban local authorities. The authorities are quite autonomous, as their councils are completely elected and as their dependence on central government financial allocations is very limited. Traditional political and administrative institutions, even more than in Kenya, have not survived in urban areas. Because of the existence of a rigid landuse planning and development control system, there are hardly any informal, unplanned or squatter settlements. However, the following few non-formal community-based organizations were identified. (1) Burial Societies, whose membership is based on ethnic or rural origin. Their basic function is to assist members when death occurs in their immediate family. (2) Savings Clubs, which mostly consist of women, while others are workplace-based. Using savings collected from members on a monthly basis, the clubs provide loans to members on a rotating basis. (3) Cooperative Societies, which are largely composed of women, and are involved in income-generating enterprises such as sewing, retailing and urban agriculture. (4) Emergency Taxi Operators, who provide an informal public passenger transport system. (5) Informal Sector Entrepreneurs, consisting of strictly regulated hawkers, peddlers, vendors, car repairers and so on.

DISCUSSION

We are aware of the loose and, possibly, provocative hypothesis of the research. We are also conscious of the many problems this work has revealed but not solved. However, we think it is better to face problems in their complexity instead of trying to adopt dubious recipes which, coming from the 'international cuisine', may be based on contextually inappropriate norms. Therefore we want here to place emphasis on some issues the research has revealed which represent problematic areas for urban

management in sub-Saharan Africa and which would need further research and debate.

The first problem area is related to what we have called 'indigenous patterns of management'. What does it precisely refer to? The research findings were very rich on this, but we were unable to classify all the activities performed outside the modern institutional framework of local government within a frame which could be supportive of real institutional innovations for managing urban growth in a modern way. Should the traditional elements be included in the formal local government structures? And if so, how would the problem of fear (on the part of central government) of centripetal forces affecting national unity be resolved? Further, there is the problem that, if integrated within the formal institutional framework, informal community-based initiatives could lose their effectiveness and become part, in a negative sense, of the bureaucratic apparatus.

The second problem area is related to the first one, and requires us to define the role local governments should play vis-a-vis the communities they are supposed to serve. The recently promoted and generally accepted 'enabling' approach to the development and management of human settlements (ref.4; ref.5) seems to fulfil the desire, all over the world, for a more sensitive, humane and community-oriented approach to local development management. Seen from this perspective, a search for administrative patterns rooted in African traditional culture would not be an isolated process, or necessarily a turning back of the clock of civilization, but a reflection of what appears to be a world-wide trend. This, however, is not to ignore recent criticism which have been made of the self-help approach. More precisely, the self-help approach tends to shift the burden of urban services costs away from the public and private sectors towards the urban poor who are least able to shoulder such a burden. Therefore, is it correct to support an even more active involvement of traditional institutions, community-based organizations and informal ad-hoc groups in urban management, when the formal local government structure has been created to accomplish this task, has been allocated money (though scarce) and has paid staff to do the job?

The research has underlined some of the problems affecting urban management in Africa and even some possible directions where solutions could be sought. We do not have definite answers to these problems, but we would like our work to be a contribution to the general debate on managing human settlements and to positive thinking on the issues involved.

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