Urban livelihoods, institutions and inclusive governance in Nairobi: ‘spaces’ and their impacts on quality of life, influence and political rights
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Citation for published version (APA):

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the study

The deplorable state of Nairobi’s informal settlements and the remarkable resilience of its citizens and their struggle to survive, made me decide to commit myself to improving the circumstances and position of the poor from Nairobi’s slums in 1993. Between 1994 and 1999 I worked on initiating multi-stakeholder programmes through international NGOs in Nairobi, which included strengthening initiatives and networks of the poor and linking them to public, civic and private actors.

These programmes were innovative in the sense of being among the first strategic multi-stakeholder approaches towards Nairobi’s slums and including the poor at decision-making level of the programme, both regarding the content and the process. The latter was not common in the East-African region at the time, as personal knowledge-exchange visits to various multi-stakeholder programmes on poverty reduction and development pointed out. Towards 1999 I tried to link the bottom-up programme on Mathare Valley slums to the donor supported city-wide governance network in Nairobi, with the aim to increase grassroots involvement in the decision-making of the city-wide governance network. However, a balanced bottom-up and top-down approach to development and poverty reduction with direct involvement of the poor in decision-making of the city-wide governance network was not yet feasible at the time.

The limitations in inclusive and responsive governance mechanisms, made me decide to pursue a Ph.D. in 2002; in order to identify alternative approaches and opportunities and constraints for impacts which would match both the urban poor and development of the greater city and include influence for the poor at decision-making level. The international development agenda since the 1990 Washington Consensus, however, mainly revolved around good governance, decentralisation and enablement of the private sector. In addition, the citizenship and deepening democracy debate mainly revolved around a rights based approach to development and processes of voice and influence through consultations over policies and implementation. In line with neo-institutionalism most research strands at the time assumed that institutions could be instrumentally designed and reformed. My earlier experiences on the ground had however clearly indicated the importance of institutional constraints and power conflicts. Only in recent years there has been an increased recognition in the literature that processes of inclusion do not automatically lead to favourable impacts and are rather interpreted as
Chapter 1

normative and ideological. Therefore, this Ph.D. can be seen as an evolving search to matching conceptions of inclusive governance in the sub-Saharan African metropolitan context.

Parallel to pursuing my Ph.D., I decided to look beyond the boundaries of the international development sector and work as a programme manager and advisor on change management, in the Netherlands as well as abroad. The international development sector at the time lacked serious attention to innovative concepts on change management, learning, knowledge management, systems thinking and complexity. This work also built on my earlier studies in change management and governance, especially my master thesis on social systems, complexity and change. The aim was to simultaneously work on both components and eventually integrate them to make a further contribution to development and poverty reduction. Only in recent years the international development sector has started to pay attention to these concepts, especially in the context of the shift of the international development agenda towards ‘endogenous development’ and ‘ownership’ in the 2005 Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness and the 2008 Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness.

1.2. Main objectives of the study

This study aims to formulate conditions for contextualised and effective mechanisms of inclusive and responsive governance. This concerns the formulation of conditions with regard to ‘invited spaces’ which are offered by the government, and ‘claimed spaces’ which are created by the poor themselves. The study questions how increased contributions to poverty reduction and improvement of quality of life for Nairobi citizens can be realised in an equitable and responsible way, while contributing to (economic) development of the city and the country. To adequately address this two-sided objective (economic growth and poverty reduction) in the contemporary context, one must analyse both processes and impacts; moreover it is necessary to examine impacts in terms of quality of life as well as influence and political rights. These issues will be further discussed in chapter 2.

The study wishes to make two major contributions to the literature and one to the development practice.

First, it wishes to contribute to a better understanding of governance and negotiation processes in claimed and invited spaces accommodated and constrained by formal and/or informal institutions, in particular in the sub-Saharan African metropolitan context. The shift towards metagovernance and
towards the mutuality of formal and informal institutions are recent, and simultaneous analysis of (institutional) conditions for impacts on quality of life, influence and political rights, is still limited.

Second, the study wishes to contribute to the development of a comprehensive conceptual framework for analysing the conditions of spaces and the ways formal and informal institutions underpin resource delivery to the poor. It seeks to overcome limitations in earlier conceptualisations, through the integration of and reflection on theoretical notions from multiple disciplines such as urban livelihoods theory, social movements theory, chronic poverty literature, citizenship and deepening democracy literature, democratic network governance literature and governance assessment literature.

Third, I hope the study will indirectly contribute to improvements in rights, influence and quality of life of the poor in sub-Saharan African metropolitan contexts and beyond. It is hoped that the discussions held during this research contribute to enhanced possibilities for poor citizens and other actors in the negotiations to be held, the hurdles to be taken and the power games to be overcome.

1.3. The setting of the study

The metropolitan city of Nairobi and Kenya as a country were partly selected because of the earlier work experience and familiarity with the situation, context and people. Nairobi is interesting because of the prominent co-existence of formal and informal institutions, high levels of political-economic complexity and the currently renewed and increased tension between formal and informal politics in the aftermath of the December 2007 post-election crisis with underlying patterns of country wide socio-economic inequality. In addition, it is interesting because of the country’s accelerated integration in the globalised economy since the early 1990s, the recent shaping of increasingly accommodating formal institutions and regulatory frameworks for private sector development, informal and formal business development, and employment creation, and the limited trickling down of the considerable macro-economic growth in recent years to the majority of citizens. Finally, Nairobi as a metropolitan is a potential international nexus point, where the conflict of economic growth and development versus quality of life and poverty reduction is sharpest. Map 1.1 shows Nairobi and Kenya in their geographical context.
Map 1.1: Nairobi and Kenya in the East African context

Source: The World Factbook (consulted November 2009).

1.4. Choice of spaces

The research focused on a combination of claimed and invited spaces to identify cross-cutting and complementary conditions and enhance chances of including spaces that work for the poor.

Claimed spaces are first the individually claimed spaces of households in the informal settlement or slums of Mathare Valley. Mathare Valley was selected based on a few considerations. First, the Mathare population is predominantly composed of citizens of the four main ethnic backgrounds of Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya and Kamba in the metropolitan city, with a relatively larger share for citizens with a Kikuyu background. Second, Mathare Valley consists of both older and newer neighbourhood villages. Mathare was selected as the only informal settlement, in order to minimise influence of different physical locations and types of authority on the research findings, given the limitations in scope of the household survey and financial resources in the context of this Ph.D. research.

Based on the identified priorities of poor citizens in the household survey, three collectively claimed spaces underpinned by formal and/or informal institutions were pre-selected for further analysis. These concerned spaces for access to peri-urban land and tenure, non-formal primary education and solid waste management. Finally, the collectively claimed spaces for access to peri-urban land and tenure were selected as case study, because this sector shows
examples of cases that actually work for the poor, by the poor, and thus contribute more to the growing international debate on social and economic impacts of (formal and informal institutions underpinning) access to land and tenure.

The invited spaces of city-wide governance networks were selected as these represent new forms of governance networks for inclusive development involving multi-level governance from the perspective of the metropolitan city. Furthermore, each governance network contains aspects of different governance network approaches and transforms through time. Three respective cases of city-wide governance networks, covering the full period of democratisation of institutions between 1993 and 2009, were studied: Nairobi Informal Settlements Coordinating Committee (NISCC), Local Authorities Service Delivery Action Plan Nairobi (LASDAP Nairobi) and City Council of Nairobi Stakeholder Forum (CCNSF).

1.5. Outline

Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical concepts and notions in the literature with regard to claimed and invited spaces, negotiation process, and impacts on quality of life, influence and political rights. Chapter 3 presents and explains the methodology and analytical framework for the study. Chapter 4 analyses the national institutional context, discussing the historical, geographic, demographic, cultural, political, governance, macro-economic and sector specific (business, employment, land, tenure and housing) institutional contexts. Chapter 5 analyses the metropolitan institutional context of Nairobi and its informal settlements. Chapter 6 analyses the livelihoods of the urban poor in informal settlements of Nairobi. It assesses the processes and impacts of individually claimed spaces of political, organisational and social relations and the sufficiency of national and metropolitan institutions for moving poverty to scale in the informal settlements. Chapter 7 deals with processes and impacts of collectively claimed spaces for access to peri-urban land and tenure for the poor through the combined use of formal and informal institutions by formal collective land purchase and informal land subdivision. Chapter 8 discusses the processes and impacts of invited spaces of city-wide governance networks in Nairobi. It distinguishes calculation and culture based governance network approaches and discusses the transformation of governance networks through time and the role of hybridisation of relations. Chapter 9 presents the main findings and overall conclusions in terms of processes and impacts on quality of life, influence and political rights, the theoretical implications, and the consequences for further research and policies.
Chapter 1

Chapters 6, 7 and 8, which present the research findings, were earlier published as articles in refereed journals. Each chapter can be read separately, contains more detailed information on the selected spaces, and provides an overview of relevant literature. Chapter 6 is accepted for publication by International Development Planning Review (IDPR) and titled ‘Urban Livelihoods and Institutions: Towards Matching Institutions for the Poor in Nairobi’s Informal Settlements?’ (Hendriks 2010). Chapter 7 was published in International Development Planning Review as ‘The Social and Economic Impacts of Peri-Urban Access to Land and Secure Tenure for the Poor. The Case of Nairobi’ (Hendriks 2008). Chapter 8 was published in Habitat International, under the title ‘City-wide Governance Networks in Nairobi: Towards Contributions to Political Rights, Influence and Service Delivery for Poor and Middle-class Citizens?’ (Hendriks 2010).