



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Solid waste collection in Accra: The impact of decentralisation and privatisation on the practice and performance of service delivery

Obirih-Opareh, N.

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Obirih-Opareh, N. (2003). Solid waste collection in Accra: The impact of decentralisation and privatisation on the practice and performance of service delivery Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam/AGIDS

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

Summary

This study on new institutional arrangements for solid waste collection in Accra shows the impact of the government's decentralisation and privatisation policies on urban governance and environmental management in the Accra metropolitan area. It provides an illustration of micro impacts of macro policies. Furthermore, the study shows a number of important elements such as large gaps between formal rules and actual practices due to the poor organisation of decentralisation and privatisation policies, inadequate fiscal transfers from the central government to decentralised bodies to match increased responsibilities, weak internal revenue mobilisation capabilities of the district assemblies, the tendency of the central government to interfere in purely local matters despite the decentralisation policy, the lack of effective urban governance and its effects on service provision, the distinctive role of the informal sector, the preference of consumers for private service providers and inadequate attention to environmental concerns in the development programmes. The subsequent discussions give brief summary them.

The thesis consists of nine chapters. Chapter 1 describes the study area, its nature and characteristics, and the methodology for the study. It shows that despite the reforms, the solid waste collection problem is far from solved.

The theoretical framework which hinges on three domains is presented in Chapters 2-4. Chapter 2 discusses decentralisation and privatisation within the broader development debate and the perspective of the African state (*i.e.* Ghana). It points out that the last three decades represent an attack on government and bureaucracy and centralisation in favour of decentralisation and privatisation. Government agencies are viewed as monopolies that have few incentives to provide effective services at reasonable cost. To a large degree they are insulated from their constituencies by layers of government bureaucracy and civil service protections so that they achieve a life of their own, serving the needs of their managers and employees as well as a few narrow, external constituencies that have leverage over them. Several market-inspired mechanisms have arisen to replace government provision or at least modify it.

Three major points can be singled out. The first refers to *uniform approach and strong external pressures*. There is the tendency to suggest uniform policy reform in spite of profoundly different settings. Decentralisation is often an abstract exer-

cise in which there is not enough appreciation for details of the strategy and its implementation. The devil lies in the details. Different situations in terms of services, institutional settings and geography merit different approaches. But the present quest for deregulation, decentralisation and privatisation tends to look for mechanical and universal strategies, which have very uneven consequences.

The second points to a *lack of political support for reforms and strong internal opposition from the leading sectors in society*. The fact that policies of decentralisation and privatisation were imposed on many debt-ridden developing countries, as part of structural adjustment programmes regardless of their actual political-economic situation, implies that domestic political support for these reforms is not always self-evident. The lack of political commitment is probably one of the most important reasons accounting for abysmal results. Strong internal opposition from bureaucrats who are expected to implement or supervise the implementation of the decentralisation and privatisation policies for fear of losing personal interests (Bayliss, 2001) and pressure from trade unions and civil society affect the processes and their outcome.

Thirdly, *conditions for successful decentralisation and privatisation are not fulfilled*. These include (i) the weakness of (local) government in its new control and management status; (ii) a private sector not always capable to step in/or reluctant to take over; (iii) the building of new layers of government versus downsizing governmental structures and cuts on government spending through SAPs; and (iv) a lack of democratic tradition, strong central government organisation to control (local) government and the private sector. Decentralisation requires a willingness on the part of central government to share power and to engage lower level units in the decision-making process. The advantages of privatisation can be maximised if the government creates a competitive environment, has adequate procedures for promoting cost reduction and service quality, strongly supports small-scale and medium-scale enterprise development and the divestiture or restructuring of state owned enterprises. Privatisation requires the government to perform an effective regulatory role to minimise corruption and inequity.

Chapter 3 puts urban environmental management in a theoretical perspective, linking it to current thinking about urban governance and sustainable development. Current policies of decentralisation and privatisation are aimed at creating appropriate institutional arrangements to enable the public and private actors work towards achieving a common goal with better results. Government and non-public agents should team up in partnership to provide economic infrastructure for devel-

opment and efficient service delivery. Partnerships are major tools in urban environmental management policies, linking directly to the governance perspective.

The chapter shows that urban environmental management and urban management are two concepts based on similar principles, the most important difference being that urban environmental management looks more beyond the city boundaries, especially in terms of environmental consequences of urban development. In practice, urban environmental management is more than urban management for its concern for the environment. In the case of urban management, environmental concerns are narrowed down to "brown agenda" problems (*i.e.* environmental health issues), often paying only lip-service to environmental concerns.

A more principled approach to urban management tries to link urban environmental management to sustainable development and sees sustainable development as meeting both human needs and satisfying considerations of ecological sustainability.

Characteristics of genuine urban environmental management are:

- Satisfaction of the "brown" agenda, notably access to decent housing and services.
- Healthy working conditions and a healthy living environment.
- A development pattern that reduces the use of natural resources, does not deplete sinks, and respects ecosystems and biodiversity.
- Seeking to include all actors in planning, decision-making and implementation as well as to integrate different sectors of the economy.

Chapter 4 addresses solid waste management, decentralisation and privatisation policies and their interrelations. It shows that a country's waste management system is a critical indicator of its level of development. Physical planning of estate development has a tremendous impact on waste management and environmental health. Reuse, recycling, and composting not only reduce the volume of waste for final disposal, but also promote the judicious use of resources.

Problems of waste disposal are severest in poor cities in developing countries. Collection points can easily become small garbage dumps, especially when collection is intermittent. In many poor countries, public budgets have been under great pressure in recent years and waste collection is often among the services to suffer most. Solid waste collection often creates one of the most visible environmental problems in low-income communities. Two groups most directly exposed to solid waste are children and waste pickers in low-income neighbourhoods in cities in developing countries. The local authority, which is the main stakeholder in solid

waste collection, should always take a special interest in the effectiveness and costs of collection methods, the effectiveness and costs of sorting systems and novel recovery methods. The public good nature means that even where the services are privatised, the public sector must remain fully engaged, at least in regulating, supervising, monitoring and evaluating the activities of private contractors. In fact, privatisation does not take away the local authority's responsibility with regard to solid waste collection.

Chapter 5 deals with decentralisation in Ghana. It gives a historical perspective of local government in Ghana, with an emphasis on the situation before and after the 1988 decentralisation policy, with special emphasis on the fiscal consequence of the reform. Though Ghana has taken clear steps to pass legislation creating new local government institutions, these are not sufficient to reap the potentials of development of decentralised local government. Being denied sufficient revenues, local governments have performed their statutory functions poorly. Thus, while structural adjustment and decentralisation were initially associated with a reduction in central transfers, the deepening financial crises at local level compelled central governments to surrender to pressures to form improved central grant systems.

The decentralisation and privatisation policies in Ghana have had a direct bearing on the quality of life, particularly in the urban areas. The private sector was supposed to take the lead in urban development, following the inability of the local authority to deliver urban services, but has largely held back for political and economic reasons. Private sector involvement in urban service delivery is still in its infancy. Nevertheless, some experiences have been gained in privatising solid waste management and sanitary services in Accra and several larger cities in Ghana. These initiatives demonstrate that the private sector has a real potential for providing improved services. However, most privatised public service delivery suffers from several drawbacks. Because of the public good nature of some public services, there is a good case for continued financial involvement by the central and the local governments to mitigate the negative consequences should individual consumers opt out of the service or be excluded from the service. If rates are artificially set at uneconomic levels and the local government does not sufficiently compensate this, the sustainability of a privatised public service will be compromised. Apart from corruption, cronyism and political patronage, this is probably the greatest threat to successful privatisation of urban services. In general terms, experiences in Ghana support common views on decentralisation and privatisation policies.

Chapters 6-8 make use of the results of the Accra investigation on solid waste collection. Chapters 6 and 7 present the results of the survey as such, while Chapter 8 assesses the survey results from the specific angle of sustainable development.

Chapter 6 deals with waste practices and the solid waste cycle in Accra and analyses the survey results. It shows that waste management, like other services such as water supply and sanitation, is of critical concern in human settlements. Poor solid waste collection practices severely affect the quality of life of its inhabitants. We showed that institutional weakness, inadequate financing, poor cost-recovery measures and the lack of clearly defined roles for agencies in charge of solid waste management seriously hamper solid waste collection. This calls for efficient and achievable institutional arrangements for collecting solid household waste.

Chapter 7 highlights the attitudes and perceptions of consumers, service providers and policy makers with respect to solid waste management. It shows that deficiencies in solid waste collection services in Accra, like in many other cities of sub-Saharan Africa, are not only a reflection of absolute resource constraints and constraints related to the institutional arrangements of urban services delivery, but are also related to the attitudes of residents and officials to solid waste collection.

In general, people serviced through the house-to-house collection system are more satisfied with the service than those serviced through communal container collection. The most common solid waste collection problems perceived by the residents are related to dissatisfaction with the low frequency of collection, the costs and the cleanliness of the service. Consumers of the communal container collection service would like to have more collection sites, containers and labour available. Much is expected from privatisation, though some fear increased prices if private sector participation in solid waste collection increases.

Policy makers, in turn, are generally satisfied with the arrangements that emerged after decentralisation and privatisation, particularly in house-to-house collection. What worries them, however, is the financial burden of the communal container collection service. The survey shows that there is a growing realisation among even the poor that the *status quo* (i.e. free solid waste collection services for collective container collection) cannot continue.

Chapter 8 assesses the socio-economic and environmental performance of public and private modes of solid waste collection in Accra. It assesses the survey results from the specific angle of sustainable development. It points out that policies of decentralisation and privatisation have completely altered the setting of solid waste

collection in the Ghanaian capital. The most decisive factor in determining differences in performance is the mode of collection: collective container collection versus house-to-house collection.

The analysis shows that privatisation has brought advantages to the consumers in terms of wider coverage, higher frequency and more reliable services (*i.e.* enhanced regularity of container haulage in areas working with the collective container collection system and regular payment of service fees by residents in the house-to-house collection system). Furthermore, there is tremendous public support for privatised solid waste collection. However, there are also a number of drawbacks. The environment and labourers are paying for some of the benefits. The major flaw of the entire system is, however, the lack of financial sustainability, which is related to the non-commercial/public good nature of the service. The financial viability of solid waste collection at city level partly depends on the success of cost recovery. In order to enhance participation in solid waste collection services and improve cost recovery, it is vitally important to give people a say in the design of the arrangements in their areas.

The concluding chapter provides a summary of the major conclusions of the thesis structured along the research questions. It links the findings to the theoretical debate of the study and makes recommendations for policy and further research. It concludes that decentralisation and privatisation have become almost universally embraced policy devices. Their shape and performance continue, however, to be shaped by local relationships and the whims of local politics. The dynamics of the privatisation of solid waste collection in the capital of Accra show that genuine political commitment to the idea, as well as political guidance of the process, were sadly lacking. For the situation to improve, attention has to be paid to the creation of an enabling framework and appropriate regulatory provisions. Furthermore, much needs to be done to widen the social and political legitimacy of the reforms. Successful public-private collaboration requires a bottom-up approach and consultation with other stakeholders on the basis of equality and mutual respect. Policies of decentralisation and privatisation may still be suitable to improve urban environmental management. Without basic institutional adjustments, sound financial mechanisms and change in attitude it will, however, be impossible to prove their value.

