

Lagos, Nigeria: A Study in Anarchy and Negotiation

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Abstract

Lagos is a megacity like no other. Not so much because it is predicted to become the world's most populous city – with approximately 80 million inhabitants in 2100 (Hoorweg and Pope, 2017) – but rather because Lagos has nothing that is really public. There's no crystal ball, nevertheless, it is likely to say that Lagos will never have (functioning) centralized services. Classic urban planning and classic developmentalism call for large-scale infrastructure and centrally organized urban services. The logic, followed by the UN and development banks establishes a strong link between well-functioning and accessible infrastructure on the one hand, and development and prosperity on the other hand. Not in Lagos. Even though the already big West African metropolis has almost no public infrastructure and services, it has become Africa's top startup ecosystem, for instance (Omoruyi, 2022). On the micro-scale, residents thrive by giving resourceful responses to the conditions of partly extreme vulnerability (Harrison, 2006). As a result, and despite of the lack of an efficient central government, the city functions quite well. By studying the informal water provision of Otumara, an inner-city slum community in Lagos, the paper draws from the observation of everyday practices recommendations for practical-normative urban planning approaches. In doing so, the substantive policy problem (water supply) is used to analyze actor constellations (Scharpf, 2018) and to decipher the conflict of elite urban visions versus everyday realities of the urban poor majority (de Satgé & Watson, 2018).

Keywords: Lagos, Sub-Saharan Africa, Local Governance, Slum, Water Supply

1. Introduction

All citizens of Lagos, poor and rich, join in the constant struggle of maintaining and operating their everyday life infrastructure, given the fact that urban services like water, electricity, or waste are only erratically available or constantly faulty. This led, among others, to a city driven by people who have developed enormous capacities to provide urban services and which is – to a large extent – produced and operated informally (Heinrich Böll Stiftung Abuja and Fabulous Urban, 2018/2019). Most Lagosians are poor or very poor (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Even if government would provide the urban services, most people could not pay for them. Here, Lagos

is no exception to other cities in sub-Saharan Africa and the global South where everyday life is constructed at a micro-scale, and not through normative planning approaches and master plans (Harrison, 2006). In the last decades, there has been a debate in theory and practice on 'society-centered' governance, especially in the global North, rethinking the roles of governments and civil societies (Grube, 2013). Equally in the field of urban planning, where collaborative decision-making processes have become the norm. However, collaborative approaches require collective goals (Innes & Booher, 2018, pp. 6-7). In a context like Lagos, the

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3. Results

3.1. Actor and their relations

Otumara is ruled by a complex, largely hidden network of informal rules, rationalities and desires. The community does live quite well with the two rival *baales*, who have somewhat subdivided their areas of influence, and, more importantly, residents are quite able to assert themselves, thanks to their own organization in, for instance, the Nigerian Slum/ Informal Settlement Federation (Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation, 2022) and, more informally, as water vendors (formerly the Water Vendor Association). Another interesting detail is

that *baale* Festus is a member of the Nigerian Slum/ Informal Settlement Federation.

The governance structures within the community ('civil society') and outside ('public sector/state', 'private sector') were studied at the example of water provision. Water for drinking, cooking, bathing, and washing is vital. People fetch their water from different sources for different uses (Table 1). Table 1 underlines the strong position of the water vendors, who are usually residents of Otumara and landlords, as they provide most of the water in the community.

Table 1. Overview of water quality in Otumara according to purpose, source, and related actors.

Purpose	Source	Quality	Providers
Drinking	Water sachets	Good	Private sector actors, daily delivery (truck), distribution mostly via small shops in the community
Cooking	Boreholes outside the community, mostly drilled around Brickfield Road	Relatively good	Private water vendors, usually residents of Otumara, usually landlords
Bathing	Boreholes outside or inside the community	Moderately satisfactory	Private water vendors, usually residents of Otumara, usually landlords
Washing	Boreholes inside the community	Moderately satisfactory	Private water vendors, usually residents of Otumara, usually landlords; Water pushers

Source: Field research, by author.

In order to analyze the relationships between the actors, the insights of Table 1 were mapped into Figure 2. The field research revealed that the water vendors have enormous power. They are marked

with a 'V' for 'veto player', indicating their capacity to veto or otherwise hinder water-provision projects by other players (Tsebelis, 1995).

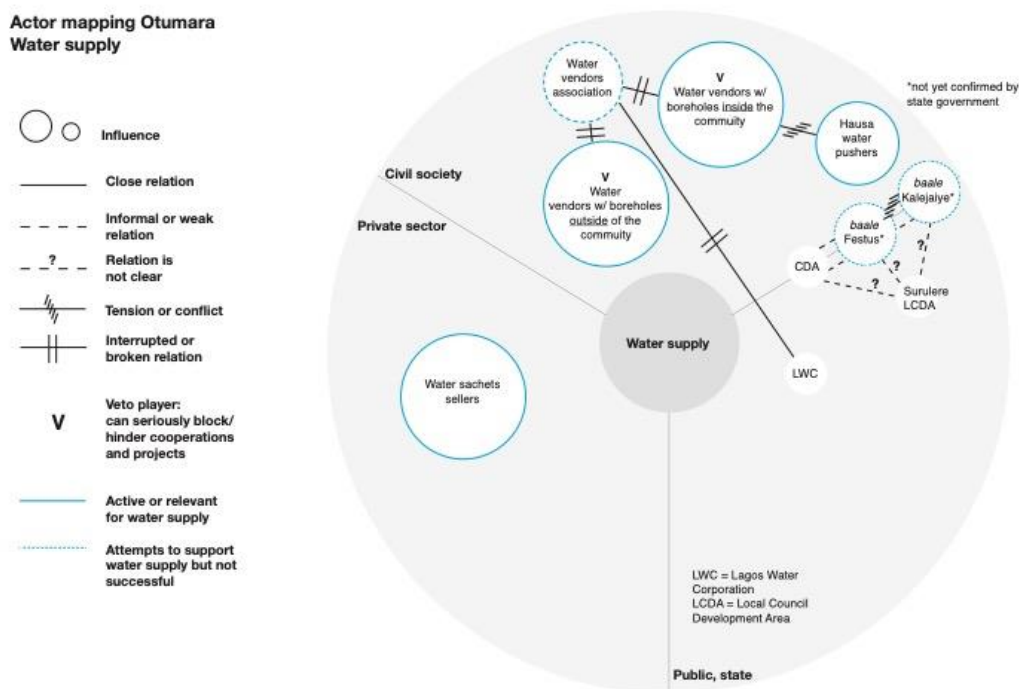


Figure 2. Stakeholder mapping for water provision. Source: Field research, by author

The two *baales* are not involved in the water provision like in other communities, where the *baales* often provide water for free at their houses, relieving a bit the distress of the community. Both tried to contribute: *Baale Festus* has two boreholes in the courtyard of his house, one installed by himself and one donated by a politician, but they are both not functioning. *Baale Kalajaiye* tried to supply the community with free water, in cooperation with the government, but failed due to the strong position and the resistance of the water vendors. This was confirmed by the water vendors.

Various sources holding different positions within the community confirmed a lack of solidarity among the community residents. The reasons given were the absence of time for pursuing common goals and the prevalence of poverty. According to the field research, people are too busy with their own struggle for survival to engage in larger community goals. Community

representatives lamented the difficulty of organizing people, for instance, against the dominance of the water vendors. On the other hand, they claimed that it would be the task of a sincere, honest, and straightforward *baale* to mobilize the people. This opinion was equally shared by LASURA officials.

The water pushers, usually young boys from the Hausa communities, are important actors on the ground. Their position is ambiguous. On the one hand, they are definitely among the key players in water provision. Even though the water they deliver is only usable for washing, people very much appreciate that they deliver water to the doorstep, especially given the fact that most parts of Otumara do not have tarred roads. On the other hand, their relation to the resident water vendors is naturally tense, as they compete for customers. The field research also revealed that they are seen as a necessary or

‘welcome’ evil, but they are clearly not respected as persons.

Unlike a *baale*, who receives his position by appointment or inheritance, Community Development Associations (CDAs) are community organizations that elect their own leaders. Any resident may become a CDA member and any member may be elected to a position. CDAs hear about needs and problems, such as broken or dysfunctional infrastructure, and report these to the local government to take action. In Otumara, there is a CDA in place but it is accused of inefficiency and corruption. According to the residents, it is not fulfilling its duties and therefore not efficient.

3.2. The role of Lagos Water Corporation (LWC)

Officially, the Lagos Water Corporation (LWC) is in charge of the water supply. Lagos State as a whole – despite a wealth of water resources – is facing a major water crisis, like many other African cities (Chiori, 2018).

Potable water supply in Lagos began in 1910, with the construction of the Iju Waterworks to serve Lagos Island. In 1915, it was upgraded to serve Apapa and Ebute-Metta. Further expansion led to coverage of Ikeja, Ikorodu Road via Iddo and eastern Lagos State. In 1977, the Isashi waterworks were commissioned to serve Isashi and Satellite Town to Festac Town. In 1982, the Iju Waterworks was modernized to boost the pressure in the existing mains and ten additional mini-waterworks were built. In 1992, in the Adiyon Phase 1 of the Lagos Water Supply Expansion Project, additional main, secondary and tertiary mains were constructed, and 88,200 properties were connected to the water supply systems (Lagos Water Corporation, 2018).

There is the Lagos Water Supply Master Plan (Lagos Water Corporation, 2018) in place. It focuses mostly on the quantity of water supply, water demand, and the demand gap. Issues of supply are not addressed. The inability and/or unwillingness of citizens to pay the bills are mentioned but there’s no strategy or approach outlined how this could be solved. The following challenges for public water supply can be identified, applicable to Otumara, other communities, and Lagos in general:

1. Intergovernmental: LWC must compete with other ministries and departments for funding. Also, insufficient information and exchange between the ministries means that upcoming or pending projects are not coordinated. For example, new or existing water infrastructure is often destroyed when roads or drainages are repaired or constructed.
2. Urbanization: The already insufficient and faulty water infrastructure cannot keep up with the rapid growth of the population in Otumara and Lagos in general.
3. Developmental model: Governor Fashola’s administration (2006-2014) tried to implement a public-private partnership approach to attract foreign direct investment through large-scale infrastructure projects (Heinrich Böll Stiftung Abuja and Fabulous Urban, 2018/2019). This mostly failed due to the lack of participation of residents during planning stage and the lack of maintenance culture. In general, there is not enough focus and attention the processes.

4. Revenue: Unpaid bills, especially in the poorer neighborhoods, are a major challenge. LWC usually bills customers a flat rate, no matter how much water is being consumed or whether water is provided by the public means at all. The latter reinforces an unwillingness to pay the bills. As people cannot afford or are unwilling to pay for the service, LWC stops the supply or, worse, willingly destroys the pipes in the communities. Water meters are hardly available and if, usually only for businesses. Also here, some sort of prepayment is the norm.
5. Informal water vendors: People must then purchase water from informal water vendors who sometimes illegally tap into LWC pipes.
6. Corruption: The most difficult aspect to analyze is corruption and nepotism. According to LWC officials, pro-forma contracts are used to commission repairs for broken or faulty mini-waterworks and other infrastructure. The contracts are paid but the work remains undone and the existing infrastructure continues to decay.

Actor Mapping
Water Supply in Lagos State

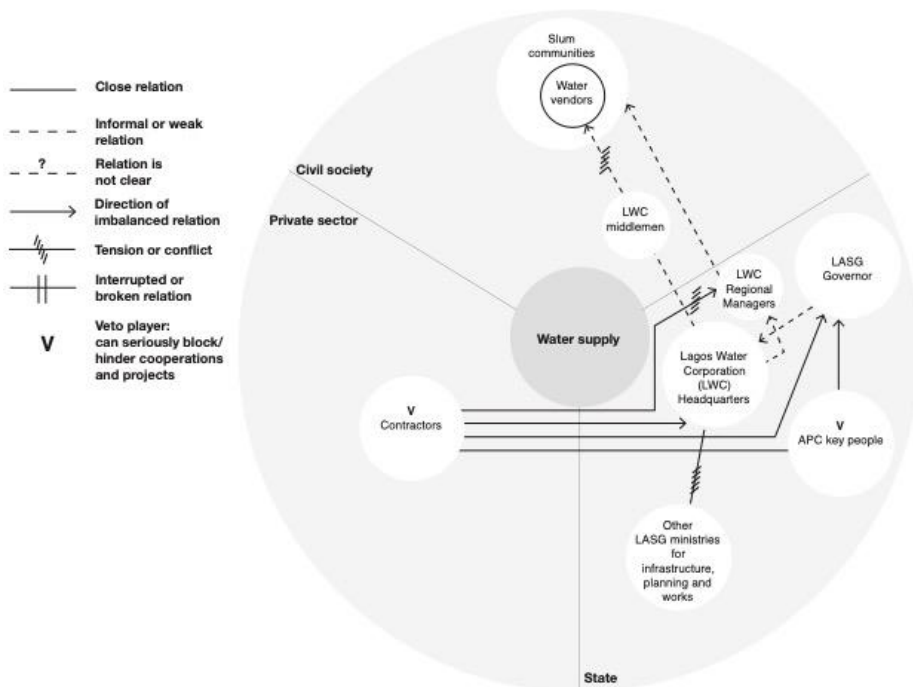


Figure 3. Mapping of the rather dysfunctional Lagos Water Corporation. Source: Field research, by author.

3.3. Comparison of formal and informal stakeholders in the water supply

In Otumara, the conflicts with LWC led in 2010 to the community’s subsequent decision to stop any cooperation with the government-owned corporation. Figure 4 shows that the formal state actors are not significantly involved or efficient in the water supply. There is still an existing water main in Brickfield Road, but it has not been in operation since 2010. However, some of the interviewed residents and water vendors said that some pipes are still (or again) in use and currently three of the landlords receive water from LWC. They had applied to the head office of LWC and after making the required payment, LWC connected the pipes to the principal main, from there, the landlords had to organize and pay for their own connection to their house. They complained that this does not go without having to bribe officers and that LWC immediately stops delivery if bills are not paid – even though LWC often does not supply water, sometimes for more than three months. LWC seems to blame this non-supply to people taping water illegally (not certified water vendors) or even packaging the water from the mains for sale; although such a case could not be identified in Otumara.

In summary, the water supply in Otumara is basically run by the private water vendors. They have a high level of expertise in providing the respective infrastructure, which includes drilling of boreholes and laying of pipes several hundred meters into the community. This infrastructure needs to be financed, maintained, and protected against vandalism and vehicles. Selling the water only partly redeems the high investments costs. Figure 3 shows that LWC is largely not able to meet its obligations. There is little or no attention to issues of maintenance, supply, and distribution or to address customers’ unwillingness or inability to pay. The overall assessment of the water supply in Otumara (Figure 4) shows on a technical scale a moderately good water supply and on the governance level a rather poor outcome. Within the community, the latter is reflected by the weak positions of the two *baales*, the inefficient CDA, and consequently the dominant position of the water vendors. Viewed from the outside, the poor outcome on the governance level is reflected in the completely inefficient role of the government.

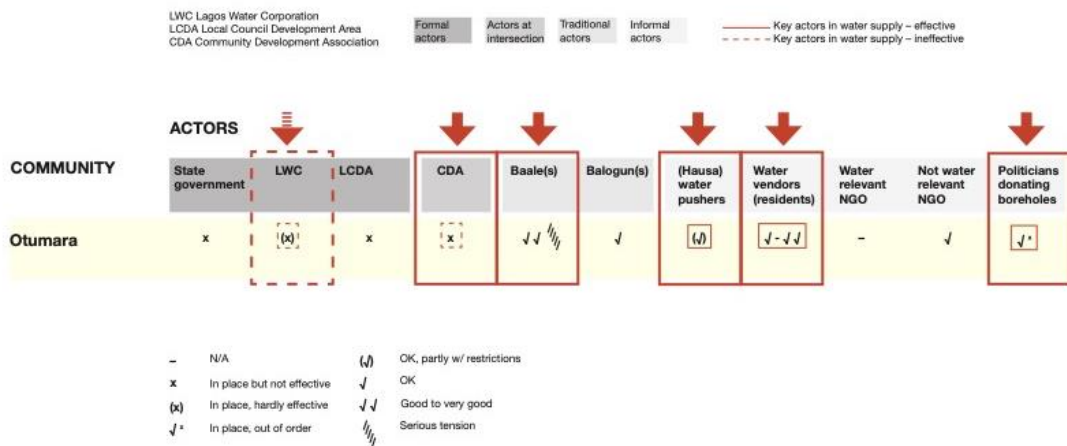


Figure 4. Comparison of formal and informal actors and their efficiency in water supply. Source: Field research, by author.

4. Discussion

Conflicts between and within governance systems

The Otumara community's decision to implement their own water system, independent of all government tiers, makes this a particularly interesting case study to investigate the efficiency of informal and/or traditional ruling systems. As described above, the decision followed a severe conflict over unpaid bills and the subsequent destruction of water pipes by LWC officers. The community does not dispute these facts. However, it is unclear according to the community whether the LWC officers destroyed the pipes in their official function or in their personal capacity because the community refused to pay the bribes they demanded.

The community has developed a remarkable capacity and expertise in providing vital infrastructure and services. The investment and maintenance costs for the infrastructure are significant, leading to relatively expensive water prices. There is no free water available in Otumara. In some communities, *baales* offer free water at their houses, but the boreholes of *baale* Festus do not function and *baale* Kalejaiye's attempts failed completely, due to the resistance of the powerful water vendors who fight against losing their business.

The analyses of the relation between formal and tradition/informal in Figure 2 shows that all of the key stakeholders and stakeholder groups are either in tension with one another or have completely stopped cooperating. Collaboration between civil society (the Otumara community) and the state (state and local government tiers) does not exist. Only the two *baales* have, by virtue of their function, contact with the local government. Seen

from outside, the community is quite successful in its fragile and voluntary self-supply, which is even more astonishing considering that the official actors mandated to link them with government, the CDA (extended arm of the local government tier, the Surulere LCDA) and the two *baales* are seemingly limited in their influence. On the other hand, both *baales* play some sort of double game, whilst being in court against each other over land issues in which they have a personal interest.

4.1. Anarchy and negotiation

The community seems to be quite efficient and able to join forces when there is a threat from outside (LWC in 2010) or from above (example of the aborted forced eviction by Lagos state government of Otumara Market 2 for a proposed secondary school).

The community, basically surviving without government support, is an example of a self-containing supply system, in which certain actors – here the water vendors – control each other suspiciously. In a certain way, this type of water supply system can be described as 'radically market-liberal' – offer and prices depend on the logic of a free-market approach. One could even call it anarchic, a situation in which the state institutions are absent and the 'law of jungle' applies (Scharpf, 2018, p. 98).

The water vendors do have a lot of influence and power, as repeatedly shown in this paper (Figure 2). They implement a sort of market-oriented water supply system, as there are no other reliable sources of water. The field research revealed that many female residents buy from them on credit as they are not able to pay the price for daily water. They repay their debts in instalments to the water vendors, who often are women themselves.

It is quite unthinkable that LWC would agree to such instalment payments. While this model is also precarious it seems to give the water vendors the legitimacy and power to be key actors.

The government tiers, both state and local, have no (positive) impact at all. Moreover, they do not even show interest in fulfilling their role and assist the community with basic services. The state-owned LWC is more or less dysfunctional making the centralized water infrastructure and supply very volatile and scanty (Figure 3).

Figure 5 shows an adaption of the 'Prisoner's Dilemma' applied to the Otumara case study. 'Prisoner's Dilemma' is one of four archetypal game constellations, borrowed from the field of game theory and used in social sciences (Scharpf, 2018, p. 75). Even though being a 'mixed-motive game', hence a mix between conflictual and harmonic preferences of the two actors, it belongs to the overall conflictual actor constellations. 'Defection' is the dominant strategy as 'cooperation' would create the risk of being exploited by the other side (LASG/LWC or the Otumara community). The 'exploitation' on the side of LASG/LWC would for instance be reflected in unpaid bills or informally tapped and informally sold water. The 'exploitation' on the side of the community could for instance result in irregular water supply despite of paid water bills due to the insufficient and faulty

water infrastructure or even the destruction of water supply infrastructure in case of unpaid bills, as reported by the community. On both sides, there's a lot of mistrust, whereas the community is clearly more vulnerable in their struggle for survival. However, Figure 5 shows that the approach 'cooperation'/'cooperation' would lead to the second-best outcome '3/3' for both sides (4 is the best result, 1 is the worst outcome). Such an approach could be summarized with the 'co-production' of urban services as it existed in Otumara with regard to the water supply before 2010. 'Co-production' would as well include the recognition, improvement, and support of the existing micro-governance in Otumara. The improvement of the existing micro-governance could break the dominance of the water vendors, lower the water prices for the community members, and help LASG and LWC to find workable ways to supply low-income communities with water. This would address the blind spot of the Lagos Water Supply Master Plan (Lagos Water Corporation, 2018) that neglects most issues of supply as well as the inability and/or unwillingness of people to pay the bills. In return, functioning 'co-production' (Simone & Pieterse, 2017, pp. 155-158) and 'hybrid' governance (Myers, 2011, S. 103), hence a mix of official government actions and informal/traditional government action would strengthen the mutual trust and improve the living conditions in Lagos.

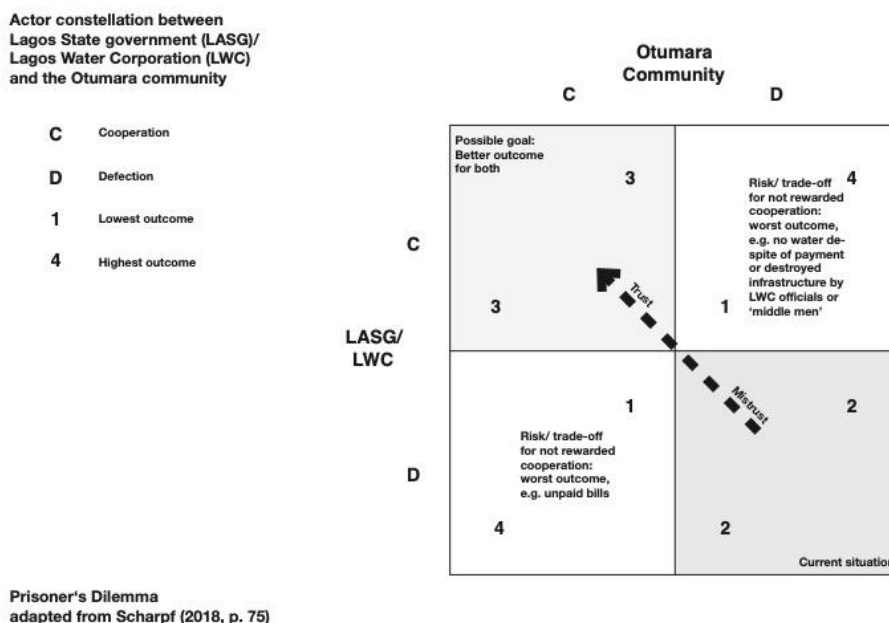


Figure 5. Analysis of actor constellation between LASG/ LWC and the Otumara Community, using the ‘Prisoner’s Dilemma’. Source: Drawing by author, adapted from Scharpf (2018, p. 75) and based on field research.

5. Way forward and conclusion

The knowledge and efficiency through which the community of 25,000 to 50,000 residents has organized its water supply services since 2010 are remarkable. However poor and precarious life might appear at first glance, people in Otumara successfully struggle to provide and access basic infrastructure water services. This is a problem at the same time: with their daily survival struggles, the community is too busy to advocate the relevant public actors for more lasting solutions. The weak commitment of tenants in engaging in community matters demonstrates the close link between land ownership, influence, and veto power. In Otumara, the water vendors and landowners have the big say.

The prospects for Lagos are since ever gloomy. Policy makers are in search for ‘solutions’ that could tackle the enormous challenges in the already dense city, short

of public urban services (OECD/UN ECA/AfDB, 2022). Numbers of the current population size vary between 15 and 24 million (Lagos State Government, 2022). Some modellings see Lagos rising up by 2100 to 80-million city (Hoornweg & Pope, 2017). Whereas the exact numbers do not matter that much (and it’s questionable whether these projections will ever materialize), it is more crucial to realize and accept the fact that Lagos will never have truly public and centralized infrastructure and services. The modelled projections immediately raise call for billions of USD for infrastructure projects through loans or foreign investment, claiming that only large-scale infrastructure can efficiently manage the economy of access and address ‘developmental issues’ (Simone & Pieterse, 2017, pp. 155-158). Besides the probable fact that parts of the funds and grants will quickly disappear through corrupt practices (Sorunke, 2016), or will indebt the city government and its citizens

for decades without services being supplied, such claims ignore the power of micro-transformation in everyday life (Harrison, 2006) (Simone & Pieterse, 2017, pp. 155-158).

The way forward seems to be twofold: interventions must focus on the communities and draw from the enormous technical knowledge that they have gained in their struggle for survival (Simone & Pieterse, 2017, pp. 155-158). The communities must be supported in developing functioning governance structures with leaders and supervisory boards. Government must be kept involved in a learning and potentially supporting role although it often does not show interest in developing such communities (Myers, 2011, p. 103).

As government has not been able over the past decades to provide clean water to all (Heinrich Böll Stiftung Abuja and Fabulous Urban, 2018/2019), the suggestion is hence that improved service delivery can only be achieved through a practical-normative orientation to urban planning and governance (based on 'what works'), and not through the 'ideal' technical-instrumental orientation of planning (Harrison, 2006) (Meuser, 2021, p. 62). So far, in Lagos, in West Africa, and in many parts of the African continent, the investments through loans and grants have not yet offered solutions to relatively simple problems, such as the affordable and sustainable provision of clean drinking water (Günther, 2016). And yet, despite these failings, international organizations, international development cooperation, and governments, including Lagos State government claim 'classic developmentalism' with heavy donor involvement in infrastructure provision to be the way forward (Simone & Pieterse, 2017, p. 156) (Heinrich Böll Stiftung Abuja

and Fabulous Urban, 2018/2019). Drawing from this research, the focus must be on the already functioning everyday ways of life (Simone & Pieterse, 2017, pp. 155-158) and not on an abstract or 'imported' centralized vision depending mostly on 'big' infrastructure projects (de Satgé & Watson, 2018, p. 50). As communities like Otumara have proven their ability to provide for themselves, as basic as it is, the question is possibly not so much how the government should be supported, e.g. through funds, grants, or capacity building programs by development banks or international corporation, but rather how the communities can be supported. Here, communities could be supported with so-called 'soft-skills', hence capacity strengthening measures. Support through 'hard ware' infrastructure always has to fit into functioning community governance structures and real community needs.

It is therefore urgent to better understand and to accept the way the city functions today (Simone & Pieterse, 2017). The city's 'DNA' or peculiarity is about micro-governance with numerous forms of informal and/ or private service delivery: Lagos is a study on anarchy and negotiation. What is needed, is a different understanding of 'government': rather than assuming the role of an investor and private player, Lagos State government needs to take a learning role, promoting and coordinating these forces efficiently. The first issue at stake is how dysfunctional micro-'governments' can be eliminated and two, how functioning micro-'governments' in communities can be established (if necessary), strengthened (where already in place) and then 'connected' (rather than 'upscaled'). Government, local and international experts, and civil society organizations need to cooperate to develop a platform, which clusters the many

functioning micro-governments without trying too much of synchronizing them (Simone & Pieterse, 2017, pp. 28, 155-158). Local NGOs, civil society, and the private sector can help the communities with technical expertise and capacity building so that community members can establish economic entities which are capable of playing a relevant part in the city's economic development. International funding should be channeled towards such initiatives and directly target local NGOs and other civil society organizations in doing so.

Concluding, the current policy and planning approaches focusing on heavy investments and (imported) large-scale infrastructure implementation will fail, for two reasons (Heinrich Böll Stiftung Abuja and Fabulous Urban, 2018/2019): the lack of funding and the lack of political will to accept the society the way it functions (Watson, 2009) (Simone & Pieterse, 2017, pp. 155-158). As the bulk of urban services and the city production is already delivered by various actors outside the government, those actors should be encouraged to do what they have been doing for so long (Simone, 2004). The first and relevant step should be the recognition of the many mini-governments (Simone & Pieterse, 2017, p. 26). The second step would be the active support of these mini-governments in tackling their everyday problems (Simone & Pieterse, 2017, p. 26). The third step would be a loose coordination of the mini-governments through targeted, small-scale interventions in the areas of water supply

(and other urban services). The basic concept is to no longer to separate between planning, production, and supply but rather to see the production and supply of urban services as planning (Simone & Pieterse, 2017).

Finally, this paper highlights a specific African case that is Lagos and therein the community of Otumara. However, empirical research on and in one of the largest cities on the African continent also reflects upon overall questions such as the nature of modernity, urban governance, and the material conditions of actually existing cities in the global South (Gandy, 2006). While improving lives in urban slums has been on the political agenda of international organizations since 2003 (UN-Habitat, 2003), the reasons for urban poverty and the structural frameworks that prevent full and equal citizenship in global South cities in Africa, Latin America, and Asia are often not generally confronted (Parnell, 2008). To make a difference and to be able to give workable advice how to improve the lives of urban slum dwellers, often poor and indigent, scholars must dare to go beyond the abstract endeavor of what the good city or the just city could or should be like (Friedmann, 2000). Researchers and professionals must enter the contested and messy terrain of urban politics and administration alongside communities, administration officials, and politicians in order to achieve the common goal of more livable and more just global South cities (Parnell, 2008).

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