

Informal settlements: Domain report

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Abstract

This working paper is a synthesis of findings from seven city domain studies which employed the African Cities Research Consortium's (ACRC's) conceptual framework to provide new insights into the challenges faced by informal settlement residents in African cities, and proposed ways in which those challenges might be addressed. The paper employs political and systems analyses to understand the political economy of informal settlements and systems failings. It argues that specific challenges can best be understood through a "developmental domain" analysis; that is, by examining how the experts, residents and political actors who have coalesced around a set of challenges come to frame and address them, invoking specific policies, practices and ideas. Informal settlements are treated both as loci of power and, at the same time, as highly influenced by power dynamics at the city and international levels. The development opportunities and outcomes associated with specific informal settlements are influenced by how power is configured. They are also influenced by residents' understanding of the specific conditions in their settlements and their ability to effectively mobilise for collective action. Essential to note is the paper's mapping of the

shifting policy context within informal settlements across the seven examined cities; this is attributed to factors like residents' accumulation of practical experience, which they use to advocate for targeted policy interventions. Ultimately, the paper highlights the pressing need for examining contextual factors which can explain the varying success rates of policy interventions across different cities. Moreover, it is essential to understand the extent to which interventions at the settlement level translate to broader systemic changes within the city and beyond.

Keywords: African cities, informality, informal settlements, service delivery, Slum Dwellers International, upgrading

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Acronyms

ACRC	African Cities Research Consortium
CBO	Community based Organisations
CCI	Centre for Community Initiatives (CCI)
CCODE	Centre for Community Organization and Development
CODOHSAPA	Centre for Dialogue on Human Settlements and Poverty Alleviation
DAWASA	Dar es Salaam Water and Sewerage Authority
EWURA	Energy and Water Utilities Regulatory Authority
FEDURP	Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor
FGD	Focus group discussion
GHAFUP	Ghana Federation of the Urban Poor
IDP	Internally displaced People
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IS	Informal settlement
ISM	IDP settlement manager
KII	Key informant interviews
MP	Member of parliament
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SDI	Slum Dwellers International
SLURC	Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre
UDCORP	Urban development corporation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
ZIHOPFE	Zimbabwe Homeless Peoples' Federation

Executive summary

Context

This working paper is a synthesis of findings from seven city domain studies which employed ACRC's conceptual framework to provide new insights into the challenges faced by informal settlement residents, and proposed ways in which those challenges might be addressed. This conceptual framework uses political and systems analyses to understand the ways in which political interests and system failures define urban challenges and constrain solutions. We analyse the informal settlements in Accra, Dar es Salaam, Freetown, Harare, Kampala, Lilongwe and Mogadishu. This set of cities offers a range of income levels, regions and security levels.

The city studies sought to understand the political economy of informal settlements and systems failings. We assume that the ways in which needs can be addressed, and potentialities/opportunities nurtured, are distinct and specific to informal settlements. While there exist some commonalities across informal settlements in the seven cities, the paper avoids problematic generalisations and tries to engage with the particular ways in which informality and informal settlements are encountered in the specific contexts.

The domain integrates the political settlements analysis (PSA) to understand the underlying forms of power and politics, and how they shape systems of governance and institutions. Informal settlements are treated both as loci of power and, at the same time, as highly influenced by power dynamics at the city and national levels. This and other understandings are generated through city researchers' engagements with low-income communities, government officials (including local-level politicians who interface with these communities) and other stakeholders and knowledge communities within the seven cities contexts.

The map below shows the cities where informal settlements domain research was carried out.

Figure 1: Informal settlements domain cities



Listed below are the key questions (among other issues) that guided the study:

1. Who are the key actors that play roles in shaping urban development outcomes?
2. What governance arrangements exist in informal settlements and how can these be defined?
3. What are the main ideologies and ideas that are relevant to informal settlements?
4. What policy approaches have been proposed as solutions to the problems identified in informal settlements and what do we know about their relative popularity and success? In addition, what new/alternative policy models are emerging that are being tracked?
5. What city systems are relevant to informal settlements?
6. What is the political significance of informal settlements?
7. How do residents situate themselves and respond to the changing circumstances in their settlements?

Key findings

The seven-city study presents four **key findings** that expand our understanding of the contested efforts to improve living conditions in informal settlements:

Firstly, while there exist some commonalities across informal settlements in the seven cities that we studied, we understand that the development opportunities and outcomes associated with specific informal settlements are closely tied to the category of land on which the settlements are located. Based on this, we identified four typologies of informal settlements across the seven cities: (1) settlements on traditional or peri-urban land, which, over time, have become incorporated or form part of the city; (2) formal settlements that have grown beyond intended residential capacity with informal extensions or tenancy over time; (3) settlements that have developed on public or private land that has been irregularly occupied; and (4) settlements established by some state authority on a “temporary” basis, without formal status ever being given. Additionally, despite the scale of new state initiatives, market approaches – that is, informal market provision of land and services – still dominate.

Secondly, governance in informal settlements is multilayered, with various actors exercising power through either competing or collaborative practices. Customary leaders emerge as important in the absence of effective service provision and secure tenure options, due to their own desire for authority, and their role as intermediaries between a governing elite that needs to demonstrate its ability to provide for informal residents, and informal residents needing to influence a spatially distant governing elite. Political elites matter to informal settlement residents; in the context of diverse and competing political interests, residents adopt multiple collective identities and strategies to lobby elites to advance their interests.

Thirdly, there is political neglect, as political elites and decisionmakers do not find systems failure politically significant or relevant and are therefore not incentivised to take action. In certain cases, these neighbourhoods are significant for the electoral success of city elites, who try to win votes in exchange for the (partial and incomplete) provision of services. However, these political elites may also exploit the vulnerabilities of informality, by coercing residents and shifting populations to alter the electoral map. Alternative political parties may dominate at the city level, creating conditions for contestation between city and national governments; however, regardless of city–government relations, informal settlements tend to remain neglected, with service provision being partial.

Fourthly, in terms of policy and planning, there are in fact extensive policy and programming efforts supporting regularisation and upgrading, with positive outcomes in at least some neighbourhoods. While coercive approaches continue, and individual neighbourhoods are threatened with relocation, the number of new initiatives suggests that governments are now keen to demonstrate their commitment to more positive options. The challenge of policy and practice mismatch is still widespread, which means that neglect and failure still persist. In terms of programming, interventions,

where they exist, are still at an insignificant scale. Mechanisms for meaningfully engaging with beneficiary communities during implementation also remain insufficient.

Implications for urban reform

Findings from the domain research highlight informal settlements at a key frontier for practical and conceptual interventions which aim to respond to the changing nature of vulnerabilities in the city, coupled with growing levels of inequality. The studies suggest that there has been a shift in how problems in informal settlements are understood and interventions formulated, with residents being viewed as critical actors whose views must feed into policy to ensure their responsiveness. In part, this openness to consultation results from residents' own individual and collective action. Residents have developed data capabilities which they strategically deploy to engage with policymakers. Findings also show that residents have amassed practical experience from different interventions that have been rolled out in their communities. Any engagements with informal settlements residents must acknowledge that residents and social movements are able to identify policy gaps and advocate for targeted policy, legislative and regulatory interventions. Efforts should focus on establishing effective mechanisms to put into practice the progressive policy proposals shaped by the residents of informal settlements. Additionally, there is a question of how to build better interfaces with policymakers to ensure scalability of interventions that are formulated.

City studies show that collective action by residents has grown in scale and sophistication to secure their needs and elevate their political project of recognition, even in the midst of dismissive attitudes that are still held by certain government officials. Informal settlements residents played vital roles in the city studies that informed this synthesis paper, particularly through the Slum Dwellers International (SDI) network. The extensive engagements with residents which was undertaken in the city studies was done in recognition of their important and varying levels of capabilities, while taking cognisance of the broad scope of what “community” means. It is essential for external actors looking to engage with informal settlements residents to acknowledge the significance of this. It is also imperative for these engagements to recognise and respect the inclination of specific residents to maintain a level of invisibility. This becomes especially crucial in the current context, where there is heightened attention on informal settlements from political elites aiming to showcase their ability to address residents' concerns.

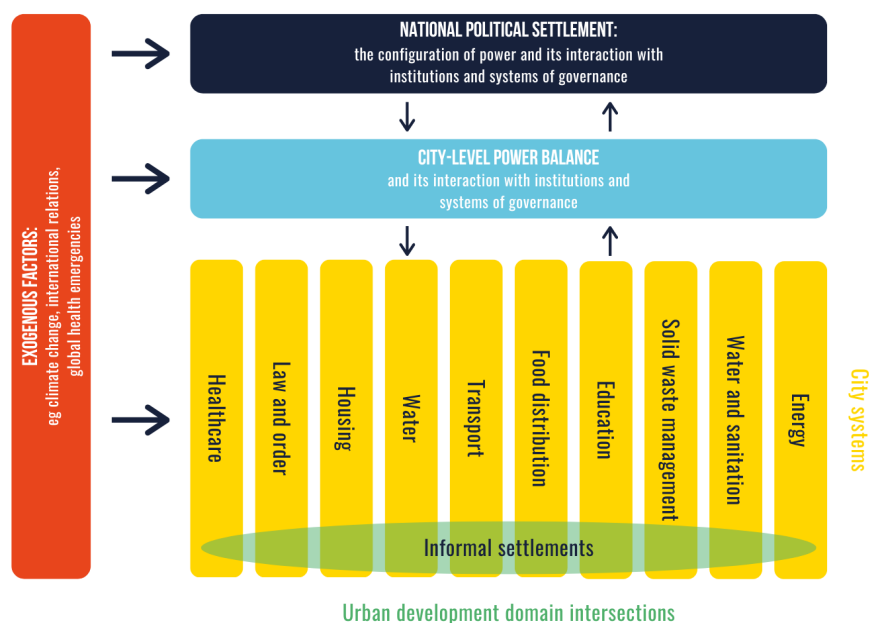
The renewed attention on informal settlements by political elites required a careful mapping by city researchers to understand the range of actors that influence various outcomes in informal settlements. The studies found that power in these settlements resides in formal and informal actors, who have varying levels of influence in decision-making at the settlement, city and national levels. Power is also dependent on the levels of influence that these actors are able to exert around issues of resource mobilisation and distribution, dispute resolution, mobilisation of internal community and external actors, and service delivery, among other things. Relations of supervision, competition, cooperation, association and/or partnership are conspicuously present in

these settlements. It was against this background that city studies suggested the need to critically examine the creative strategies employed by residents to negotiate with elites. This exploration can in turn enhance our understanding of how residents navigate clientelist arrangements to obtain material benefits and secure formal recognition. There is also space within such an analysis to engage with the multiscalar and multilayered structures employed by residents to organise, sensitise and mobilise for urban reform.

1. Introduction

The ACRC's holistic framework for analysing urban development in Africa has three integrated components – **politics**, **systems** and **development domains**. The politics component uses “political settlements” theory to model how power is configured at the national and city levels, and then analyses how these configurations of power shape (and are shaped by) urban development processes in the given city. The systems component analyses the functioning of the key systems (composed of physical infrastructure and people organised in various ways) that sustain and/or improve urban life in the city. The domains component looks at some of the distinct fields of discourse, policy and practice that have formed around complex, intersystemic development challenges in the city, and analyses how the actors (political, bureaucratic, professional and popular) engaged in these fields collaborate and/or compete for authority. The diagram below gives an indication of how these three components come together.

Figure 2: ACRC's conceptual framework



The city studies sought to understand the political economy of informal settlements and systems failings. We assume that the ways in which needs can be addressed, and potentialities/opportunities nurtured, are distinct and specific to informal settlements.

1.1. What are our findings?

Any effort to deal with substantive issues of urban poverty and inequality in Africa must address the needs of those living in informal settlements. These settlements are where the majority of urban Africans – including some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised – live and work. Understanding the challenges that residents of informal settlements face, and the successes and failures of efforts to address them, is key to promoting inclusive urban development. Theorisations of urban informality show that this phenomenon defies simplistic solutions; they also emphasise the subtleties of social attitudes to, and representations of, informality. There are multiple continua required to define informality and the complex practices of those communities designated “informal”.

Complex and contentious as the theorisation of informality is, the challenges associated with informal settlements are widely accepted by scholars in this field. The scale of informal settlements reflects the inability of governments (that is, political elites) to provide for residents’ needs for housing and associated essential services; as a consequence, urban dwellers find homes in informal neighbourhoods without tenure security, or the basic services required for safe, secure and comfortable occupation. Their non-compliance with the laws and regulations related to housing reflects their low incomes and the lack of public provision, rather than a refusal to comply. Such a lack of services has a negative impact on economic activities, as well as on health and well-being.

This seven-city study uses ACRC’s conceptual framework to provide new insights into the challenges faced by informal settlement residents and propose ways in which those challenges might be addressed. This conceptual framework uses political and systems analyses to understand the ways in which political interests and system failures define urban challenges and constrain solutions. It argues that specific challenges can best be understood through a “developmental domain” analysis; that is, by examining how the experts, residents and political actors who have coalesced around a set of challenges – in this case pertaining to informal settlements – come to frame and address them, invoking specific policies, practices and ideas. We analyse the informal settlements in Accra, Dar es Salaam, Freetown, Harare, Kampala, Lilongwe and Mogadishu. This set of cities offers a range of income levels, regions and security levels.

We find that informal settlements represent a well-established domain in these cities. Multiple state officials at both national and local levels have explicit authority to address the needs of informal settlement residents as a specific target group, and to consider the future of informal settlements in the context of city development. A distinct set of authorities in each city is tasked with working specifically on and in informal settlements. Additionally, staff of public agencies, academic departments and civil society organisations debate ideas, policy and programming approaches with respect to informal settlements. In many urban centres, informal settlement residents are organised in multiple ways to address their own needs – in party political-affiliated, faith-based, ethnic, cultural, women’s, and youth groups, and service-related groups,

such as water and waste management committees. Needs may be addressed through self-help and/or by engaging those with power/command of resources. Being an informal resident is an acknowledged social identity in these cities, that may be either accepted or consciously concealed, depending on the context and potential outcomes that this may generate.

The interest of elites in informal residents is longstanding. The academic literature emphasises the clientelist relations between the two groups that result in a lack of adequate service provision for communities in the long term; in this paper, we show that there has also been a growth of policy and programme action (point 4 above) – at least at the level of legislation and planning – as authorities recognise that hostility undermines their own credibility and threatens their electoral success. Governments appear to be seeking to find a balance between reinforcing imageries of the modern city with formal tenure and services (and hence repeating an eradication and removal narrative with regard to informal settlements) and demonstrating that they have the capabilities and commitment to transform spatial informality through an incremental development process. While political elites continue to practise clientelism, those in government seem to recognise that more is required to serve informal neighbourhoods.

However, policy and programming initiatives do not always get implemented – neglect and failure persist. There is no evidence to suggest that any government has sought to provide universal services to low-income urban populations. While officials may understand ideological commitments such as the right to water, they are not accepted in this context. This may be because of the perceived illegality of residents' informal occupation. Officials may also find advantages in the lack of networked services and use this to develop clientelist networks. Water, sanitation, waste management, energy and drainage are not provided by state agencies at scale. Where they are provided, this is spatially limited and on-site solutions (such as boreholes, pit latrines, waste pits, and so on) are encouraged, without regard for the public infrastructure required to foster good health and wellbeing in high-density areas. These multiple system failings underpin development deficiencies within informal settlements. While the residents of informal settlements on the periphery of the city may be able to partially address their needs through on-site provision, at higher residential densities this is not the case.

1.2. What is the significance of our findings?

The African context remains distinct. More than 56% of the urban population in Africa live in informal settlements.¹ Addressing needs of low-income residents has become more complex because of the scale of rental accommodation. Tenants face even more acute difficulties than homeowners, with limited access to on-site infrastructure and additional charges as services are improved. In many cases, homeowners do not reside in these settlements and thus do not experience the challenges occasioned from

¹ The United Nations notes that 424 million live in urban centres in sub-Saharan Africa, while SDG monitoring reports that there are 280 million living in informal settlements in sub-Saharan Africa (UN SDG, 2018).

these shortfalls in service provision. There remain extensive areas of relatively low-density settlements on the periphery of larger cities, and many small towns in which densities are also low. In these areas, it is easier for residents to self-provide, although tenure insecurity remains, and the quality of services is frequently very poor. Both inner city and peri-urban areas are found across the global South, and African specificities are related to degrees rather than absolutes.

It is not possible to address issues of poverty and inequality without simultaneously confronting tenure security and access to essential services for the dwellers in these settlements. These systems are inseparable from political economy and politics. To tackle these issues, it is necessary to shift focus towards understanding market failures, while underscoring the indispensable roles that the state can play in unlocking land for housing and basic services. Within this space, there are opportunities to suggest co-produced and incremental interventions that can support residents' access to housing and other services. This is also the case when it comes to the identification of appropriate tenure mechanisms that can facilitate access to land for informal settlements residents. While our findings demonstrate the existence of a broad range of mechanisms for securing land tenure for marginalised urban residents, they also underscore the value of experimenting within better coordinated frameworks aimed at developing scalable, site-specific solutions.

Finally, engaging with informal settlements residents in this research served as a reminder that for residents researching their own situation, there are no distinctions between knowledge and action. It was clear that, in order to undertake research which could contribute to meaningful and progressive reform, city researchers needed to eschew the problematic approach that views issues in informal settlements as inherently encumbered by structural constraints. This speaks to the value of adopting radical alternative methodologies which are embedded in the worlds that we study, and which have traction across scale. It then requires a commitment by researchers and policymakers to eschewing approaches that focus on problematics and engaging more with methodologies that allow for a more engaged, politically informed and systemic problem diagnosis.

Strategies for policy action

In summary, and in terms of policy guidance to advance the reform frontier and addressing the needs of those currently living informal settlements in African cities, the research findings highlight five policy-related conclusions.

First, the organisation of informal settlement residents appears essential to more inclusive policy and programming efforts to date. It is their (selective) visibility that has ensured that their realities, needs and interests are present, and are not ignored by political elites and formal structures of government. The reinforcement of this position through the SDGs appears to have made a significant contribution, as have city-based reform coalitions that have provided platforms to amplify the voice of informal residents and convene multistakeholder deliberations. Both citizen mobilisation and the presence

of reform coalitions (formal and informal) appear important to securing political commitment. Notable here is the lack of tenant-specific organisations; this may account for the relative neglect of tenants in policy reform.

Second, the challenge to get progressive policies enacted to ensure that there are effective systems across the city may be considerable, due to the scale of budgets required. Recent approaches to service delivery may include special provision for the lowest income households but they are, typically, run by commercially orientated public (sometimes private) agencies who are expected to cover their costs. With the continuing dominance of neoliberal approaches to service delivery, ensuring an adequate scale of programming is likely to be difficult. The risk is that services remain partial and fragmented, and hence informal settlement residents lack the conditions required for good health, and local businesses struggle. The need for improvements in multiple systems and coordination of such investments exacerbates the problem. Options for tenure security are context-specific and related to the type of tenure status (as described above); and they are related to the location of the land and therefore the scale of contestation related to land values. What is required is that better tenure security options and improved service provision are considered simultaneously.

Third, it is essential to steer interventions away from prevailing modernist urban design prevalent in local government policies. Regarding the favoured interventions in the city studies, there is a focus on co-produced incremental models that aim to minimise disruption for residents as much as possible. Among residents, professionals, civil society organisations and official development assistance agencies, there is broadbased support for in-situ upgrading, as it is found to conform to ideas of an inclusive city. Recognising that upgrading is not a standardised process, it is crucial to thoroughly explore opportunities within upgrading frameworks that can be used for raising government awareness about issues in informal settlements and extending universal recognition to these communities.

Fourth, and related both the need to move away from the commodification of basic services and the requirement to support upgrading, there is the need for immediate and sustained attention to examining investment capacity within both national and local governments, and mobilising resources for large-scale projects. This requires a political strategy to generate commitment from elites, both to address the needs of those living in low-income neighbourhoods, and to optimise existing skills within local authorities, while addressing any shortfalls in skillsets. Contestations between levels of government, different functional agencies (including ministries and departments) and more broadly based competing interests are problematic in many cities. While problematic at one level, such contestations also point to the resource-generating potential of cities, and hence the rewards available to those who manage urban development effectively.

Fifth, this suggests that strategies to address the needs of those living in informal settlements are most likely to be effective if they are aligned with broader plans to improve urban development across the city. Platforms that enable diverse stakeholders

to come together to identify common interests and complementary agendas appear to be significant and strategic here.

1.3. Structure of the paper

Following this introduction (Section 1), Section 2 presents the literature relevant to an understanding of the themes discussed in this paper. There is a large literature on informal settlements, so we needed to be selective. Section 3 introduces the methodology used and elaborates on the contribution of the community researchers. Section 4 reports on the findings in four sub-sections: the first draws on findings across the seven cities to present a four-type categorisation of informal settlements based on tenure types; the second focuses on state provision in informal settlements, including the role of customary leaders and community activists; the third discusses specific infrastructure and service provision to highlight both the need and potential for reform; and the final subsection summarises legal and policy efforts. Section 5 summarises the significance of these findings for our understanding of the political and system dynamics associated with improved outcomes. Section 6 concludes.

2. Summary of prior knowledge

2.1. Understanding informality and settlements

Informality and informal settlements continue to capture the attention of urban scholars, given their sheer scale, particularly in the global South. Informal settlements have been described as the “most pervasive mode of urbanisation throughout cities of the global South” (Dovey et al., 2020). As mentioned before, over half of the residents in sub-Saharan African towns and cities live in informal settlements. These are neighbourhoods characterised by a lack of secure tenure, lack of basic services and infrastructure and, frequently, unsafe housing which does not comply with building standards and regulations. In some cases, particularly where residents have purchased plots for greater tenure security, the land may not be zoned for residential use. It is the lack of tenure security and non-compliance with zoning and building regulations that explain why there is so little infrastructure and services. Infrastructure investments are particularly problematic when neighbourhoods are located on land held by private non-resident owners. While discussions here highlight commonalities across informal settlements, we recognise the need to question such generalisations and acknowledge diversity between and within cities (Gulyani and Talukdar, 2008). We also acknowledge that any engagements with informality and informal settlements must be grounded in their historical and political economy contexts.

In this research, informality is understood as a “negotiated process in which different actors have (and negotiate) different forms of authority or subservience” (Banks et al., 2019: 227). It is an organising logic that is entangled with geography/territory and practices (AlSayyad, 2003). This means that informality must be treated as a fluid concept that acquires different meanings, depending on the geographical context (Roy and Alsayyad, 2003) and on political moments (Hasan, 2003). But this approach to

informality also demands for a more “systemic view”, which considers the relevant social, economic and institutional systems that have a bearing on informality (Herrle and Fokdal, 2011). This sees informal settlements as sites in which processes underpinning economic, social and political inequality in towns and cities emerge and consolidate.

Analysing informality also requires careful reflection, which must be grounded in realities encountered and generated by actors operating within and across informal settlements. The state is one such actor that often retains a unilateral authority to define what kinds of informality are acceptable and what kinds are not. But states are themselves composed of multiple agencies with inconsistent policies; local governments may resist calls for regularisation, even where corporatised utilities are willing to supply services (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2014). Other actors include elites (both internal and external to a given nation and its state structures), who may engage for economic and political reasons, and subaltern groups. Engaging with these groups can provide critical perspectives for understanding informality and its spatial manifestations in informal settlements. Additionally, the practices of negotiation and contestation of informality by informal settlement residents (their agency) require more attention (Etzold et al., 2009).

Location, morphology and identity are the three primary dimensions through which Dovey (2019), in his influential analysis, understands informal settlement. He presents informal settlement as a set of practices and as a mode of production of urban space that emerge outside the formal controls and regulations of the state. Location is concerned with where and why informal settlements emerge, morphology with how they emerge and develop, while identity relates to the perceptions that informal settlements attract within the discursive, political and policy practices (Dovey, 2019). In contrast, we view informal settlements as a “domain”, that is, as a field of power, policy and practice that is constituted by different actors and epistemic communities that seek to claim authority and rights over that field through various means (Kelsall et al., 2021). We believe that this will facilitate comprehension of the ways in which city systems combine and overlap to produce particular problems and solutions to urban development; and enable us to analyse a context in which such neighbourhoods contribute to the political processes of governing, maintaining power and rent capture. Understanding informal settlements as a domain offers a better route to reframing sectors in a broader, more systemic and more politicised way.

2.2. Significance of recognition

Exclusion from basic services primarily results from the state’s non-recognition of residents’ occupation of land and tenure rights in informal settlements. The state’s hegemonic power enables it to privilege certain statuses and to legitimise certain entitlements. Through its use of tools like the law and regulations, the state can confer recognition to certain types of occupation of space, while denying others. This has a significant bearing on how individuals access opportunities and outcomes (Douzinas, 2002), and, within cities, basic services and amenities – state recognition of settlement

rights precipitates recognition of other entitlements. While the reality in many contexts is that recognition does *not* lead to subsequent provision of basic services, we view recognition as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition, in the functioning of informal settlements.

Recognition can be understood as a continuum, from one-off official actions to the accumulation of rights over time (Fernandes, 2011). Official action and incremental accumulation of rights are “planes of action”, in which one’s status can transform from one thing to another, oftentimes with corresponding access to new forms of entitlements. In many contexts, rights to occupy space will be conferred “by the stroke of an administrative pen” (Goodfellow and Owen, 2020), with a formal title document issued to an individual by the responsible state agencies. In many cases, this final act will be the result of lobbying and petitions by individuals who do not hold formal paper titles. Claims that accumulate over time and that have gained some forms of legitimacy can also be socially or legally recognised, making them enforceable (Cole and Grossman, 2002). This can, for instance, facilitate the claiming of prescriptive rights in the form of adverse possession by certain occupants of land.

Regularisation of land occupation is a common official act through which recognition is conferred. It often entails a set of processes that are designed to bring individuals with an interest in land towards first registration and titling of the land. It builds on the incremental accumulation of rights by individuals who then solidify their claims through official recognition. Regularisation has as its goal the realisation of tenure security by beneficiaries of such programmes, and there is agreement that tenure security is a central element for improved conditions in informal settlements (Pieterse, 2008), removing the uncertainty and associated stress related to eviction risk.

Although land titling has been famously proposed (De Soto and Diaz, 2002) and adopted as an end goal for regularisation initiatives, there is contestation around the contribution of formal titles to addressing the needs of informal settlement residents (Payne et al., 2009). Proponents argue that bestowing individual title is the most effective mechanism for establishing secure property rights. Its attractiveness as a tenure intervention is largely premised on the perceived stability, predictability and protection from unlawful expropriation. It is also argued that individual property titles will create greater security for lenders, and that this will result in increased lending and investments, unlocking the “dead capital” of low-income businesses in informal settlements (De Soto and Diaz, 2002; DFID, 2014). Another assumption is that by providing private, formal titles at an individual level – as opposed to other intermediate recognition of claims – individuals will be secured against expropriation.

However, this may not be as straightforward as its proponents argue. Indeed, for tenants, titling may exacerbate insecurity by increasing not just the quality of infrastructure, services and housing, but also the rent. Titling may create further insecurities for the lowest-income landowners by triggering land speculation and gentrification, with residents selling their land for perceived financial gain or to survive further crises, such as economic downfalls or disasters. Individual land titling is said to

incentivise residents to invest more in their properties, resulting in higher incomes and higher productivity (DFID, 2014); however, Payne et al. (2009) argue that the inverse can also work, whereby the absence of formal titling incentivises households to invest, because it reduces the likelihood of eviction. Moreover, formal titles may not catalyse investment in either public infrastructure or housing improvements, and there is uncertainty about the most appropriate form of title to be issued upon regularisation, due to a lack of official data on informal settlements.

Regularisation of urban services can also contribute to the legal recognition of inhabitants' occupation of land in informal settlements. It has been employed as a first step in seeking recognition of occupation and regularisation of land tenure (Hylton and Charles, 2018). Regularisation of services provides *de facto* tenure security, as seen in São Paulo, where evictions have been avoided as a result of the inordinate costs associated with the removal of already established utility networks (ibid: 46). Hylton and Charles note that in such cases where regularisation of basic services is pursued, utility bills in the residents' names can serve as documentation to support their calls for land tenure regularisation (ibid: 45). Claimants can also use the utility bills for various evidentiary purposes whenever they seek access to other services. According to Goodfellow and Owen (2020), creating a paper trail can be a tactical manoeuvre to "thicken" their claims and thereby obtain some forms of recognition.

Such a paper trail enables a material claim. It has an additional relevance where governments periodically grant legal status to informal settlements on public land, if the occupants can prove settlement prior to a cut-off date (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2014). Also important is the psychological effect of being a bill-payer and the sense of legitimacy and respect it garners from peers (Rosenzweig and Wilson, 2022) which then influences bill-payers' ability to challenge exclusion by authorities. However, the privatisation and corporatisation of basic services has weakened the link between services and tenure security. Companies seeking income may be motivated to provide services in informal neighbourhoods, while local governments, motivated by factors like their reluctance to extend formal or administrative recognition to settlements, may be inclined to deny households access to other rights (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2014).

Even though recognition can lead to other desired outcomes in informal settlements, there is also an argument for preserving the invisibility of informal occupation, as a tactical manoeuvre to avoid the law and contest formality. There is a paradigmatic idea that urban development should involve "modern" citizens paying rates and service bills, and hence that informal settlement upgrading will turn disadvantaged residents into fiscally responsible urban citizens (Horn, 2020). However, although the widely held assumption that informal services are relatively expensive is broadly true, it does not necessarily follow that networked services provided through what are generally corporatised utilities will be any more affordable, especially in combination with potentially higher charges (rates and local authority taxes) for regularised, improved housing (Fieuw and Mitlin, 2018). Moreover, formalised and privatised water and sanitation services will sometimes have higher transaction costs (legal services,

dispute resolution and other administrative costs) than informal services; and/or their aggregation into monthly or bimonthly payment regimes may prove difficult for poor households to manage (Dagdeviren and Simon, 2009). This makes provision of basic services inefficient and costly, particularly for those in the low-income category.

2.3. Understanding stigma

The non-recognition of informal settlements impacts residents in several ways. A commonly discussed implication relates to the absence of basic services and threat of forced evictions. Residents' stigmatisation as an outcome of non-recognition has received inadequate attention in literature. Government agencies often regard informal settlement residents as urban transients, an attitude that easily justifies the non-provision of basic services and evictions; some higher-income formal settlement residents regard informal settlement residents as socially inferior, which adds to the latter's difficulties in finding work, accessing services and other public benefits, and holding state actors to account.

Perlman (2007: 14) shows how such attitudes affect the incomes of favela versus non-favela residents. Favela residents are paid only 40% of what non-favela residents are paid for an identical period in education (16 years). In her longitudinal study, she finds that the residents in the community she originally studied are doing better than newer residents to the city, in that they have been more socially mobile. However, residents recognise that they face continuing discrimination, in part because "... simply living in a favela may be equally stigmatising, and many people told of being afraid to give correct addresses in job interviews, knowing that eyebrows would be raised and the interview terminated if this were known" (Perlman, 2004: 135).

Similar findings emerge elsewhere. For example, Marx and Charlton, in a study of housing conditions in Durban, explain that, "In discussions with residents of informal settlements, each of them referred to the fact that they felt that friends and relatives from formal areas look down on those who live in informal areas" (2003: 8). Bayat and Denis (2000) note that some Egyptians perceive informal neighbourhoods as triggering a "social disease": "[T]he informal cities are perceived by many in Egypt as representing a Hobbesian locus of lawlessness and extremism, producing a 'culture of violence' and an 'abnormal' way of life" (ibid: 185). Such widespread negative portrayals and stereotypes of informal settlements generate perceptions of "acceptable" versus "unacceptable" neighbourhoods, and between "deserving" and "undeserving" residents, with negative consequences for health (Dev et al., 2023). This also leads residents themselves to be ambivalent about their residency.

Some Covid-19 narratives intensified the stigma associated with low-income, under-serviced neighbourhoods, by representing them as high-density, high-risk locations. These discourses resonated with earlier representations of informal neighbourhoods as "dirty". National strategies included a homogenised (and often brutal) enforcement of order under lockdown. City police were tasked with placing physical constraints to stop

people from reaching their places of work,² while the closure of markets, demolition of informal shops³ and prohibition of street vending prevented people from earning a living.⁴ Associations made between dirt, poverty and moral delinquency constitute a powerful social stigma around informal settlement living. Bhan (2009) shows how this discourse accompanied an increase in evictions in Delhi over the last 15 years; he quotes high court judgments that argue that the displacement of low-income settlements is necessary if the city is not to be “allowed to degenerate and decay” (ibid: 128). The emphasis on the lack of cleanliness particularly stigmatises women, who are considered responsible for the household (Songsore and McGranahan, 1998; Obrist, 2004).

2.4. Understanding systems-politics interactions

Informal settlements in African cities are governed and managed by a multitude of actors who have diverse interests. They include public sector actors, civil society organisations (including NGOs and CBOs) and the private sector. These actors often have relations of supervision, competition, cooperation, association, and/or partnership. Residents of informal settlements constitute the largest stakeholders in the domain. These are mostly low-income or lower-middle-income individuals who experience similar vulnerabilities and stresses in terms of access to basic services, livelihoods, security, protection, and climate related emergencies such as floods and fires. However, within this group there are significant inequalities in terms of social status, voice and the freedom to organise, and these relate to identities of gender, generation and ethnicity. Even within individual households, gender and other power dynamics may feature to influence how opportunities and outcomes are accessed. Informal settlement residents are also divided according to their relationship to the neighbourhood; in many locations, tenants are a significant group with a lower social status than landowners; tenants may be excluded from equal participation in community activities, along with women, the young and old, and marginalised ethnic groups. In a context in which donor agencies favour specific marginalised categories, groups may claim a given identity to access resources.

Informal settlements are the loci of animated struggles for control and influence of various city systems by different actors, based inside and outside the settlements. Service provision in informal settlements is easily instrumentalised by political actors because services are essential and residents are vulnerable (Collord et al., 2021). Such political actors may use critical service and secure tenure provision to establish a clientelist relationship with residents; this personalised service/title provision may be about winning votes or, in some cases, absorbing pressure from residents (Mitlin, 2014). In Nairobi, for example, President Daniel Moi secured his power by allocating land to elites who rented it to structure owners, who then sublet rooms to low-income

² See Goñi (2020).

³ See www.justempower.org and [@justempower](https://twitter.com/justempower) (X, formerly known as Twitter) for updates on this in Lagos, such as the demolition of shops at Ijora Badia on 30 May 2020.

⁴ See, for example, Hayden (2020).

households. Public land was then a tool that would be used to “buy” support from the opposition especially in cities where the ruling party’s control was perpetually at risk (Klopp, 2008). In the academic literature, there is an inadequate engagement with the question of who exactly holds power and exercises authority in informal settlements.

Some studies have been done to document how politics features in these contexts particularly in relation to how spaces for community participation are structured (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2015). A more actor-focused analysis, which pays attention to the informal politics, is required to facilitate perspectives on how politics inform service provision in these contexts and how residents negotiate around service provision (Mitlin, 2014; Auerbach and Thachil, 2018). Collord et al. (2021) also observe the need to move from generalisations about clientelism across African cities to a more fine-grained neighbourhood analysis. They argue that this kind of analysis might be helpful in advancing an understanding of clientelism that goes beyond the idea of handouts or programmatic appeals, to one that examines its bearing on issues like taxation, access to housing and more.

Informal settlement residents have often been painted as hapless actors influenced by the whims of the powerful. But most inhabitants have mastered the art of navigating formal and non-formal authority to gain access to resources that they can use to expand their power and conditions. They do this by employing various strategies that range from contentious politics to collaborative and subversive acts (Mitlin, 2018). In some cases, residents will make “pragmatic calculations” in order to secure land and basic services, but this does not necessarily mean that they align with the policies of dominant elites (McGregor and Chatiza, 2019). Residents also exploit legal and political openings to assert their agency in participatory planning processes and demand the establishment of critical sanitation infrastructure and other public amenities like roads (Ouma, 2023). Understanding how residents enter and navigate spaces that have been structured to exclude them, and how in the process they construct their identities, can help unsettle the commonly held view of informal settlements residents as victims of clientelism (Fattah and Walters, 2023).

Politicians may also use alternative strategies, seeking to coerce and intimidate populations at election time (see Muchadenyika and Waiswa (2018) for a comparison of Harare and Kampala; and McGregor and Chatiza (2019) for a discussion of the significance of Harare’s periphery to electoral success in Zimbabwe). In such cases, politicians may manipulate youth and encourage mob violence within and beyond the boundaries of informal neighbourhoods. In some cases, violence may be used to intimidate voters and secure their support for a particular party. In other cases, violence may be used to displace supporters of one party, forcing them away from their neighbourhood and preventing them from exercising their right to vote (Gebrehana, 2021). The search for electoral success may lead politicians to evict informal settlement residents, either to beautify urban spaces and/or to build public service infrastructure (for example, roads and ports). Visions and representations of modernity continue to influence African leaders greatly (Watson, 2009); modernist projects have

been used to seek legitimacy and project an image of effective governance since independence. Not only does this result in physical displacement (frequently without compensation) and a loss of incomes and assets, but it also reinforces the narrative about the inappropriate nature of spatial and economic informality.

In many cases, evictions are orchestrated by state agencies under the guise of eliminating “disorder” and replacing it with modernist urban planning practices (Davis, 2014). Violence is thus systematically produced and employed by the state and elites in the attempts to erase low-income groups from certain spaces, in order to attract global capital for housing and infrastructure development. Politicians may also employ violence to displace low-income residents and to facilitate the accumulation of public land by powerful actors who may then construct unaffordable housing on the land (Klopp, 2008). State-orchestrated violent evictions of informal settlements took place on an unprecedented scale in the 2000s, when many governments sought to make their cities attractive for foreign capital to fund large-scale development and infrastructure projects (Du Plessis, 2005). These evictions were said to be “in the public good” to make the city more “efficient” (ibid). The notions of development that were adopted during this period excluded low-income groups from the imagination of the city and reduced them to spatial illegality (Bhan, 2016).

For example, in 2005, the ZANU PF government carried out one of the largest forced evictions in Harare, Operation Murambatsvina, leading to the displacement of more than 700,000 people, ostensibly to restore order in the city (Tibaijuka, 2005; Chitekwe-Biti, 2009). The chair of the government-appointed Harare Commission stated that violations of the city bylaws were responsible for the deterioration of standards in the city and that they were negatively affecting the city’s image (Potts, 2006). What was particularly surprising in the wake of these evictions was the pervasive attitude amongst certain members of the public and city officials that the irregularly established low-income houses were more deserving of demolition than the more permanent “formal” housing that was also destroyed as part of the evictions (ibid).

It is important also to acknowledge the roles played by customary authorities when it comes to access to land and basic services – over which they exert considerable authority. The literature on their roles in the city has often subsumed them under discussions of informality (Marrengane et al., 2021). This has prevented a more careful assessment of these actors as legitimate sites of authority and limits our understanding of their central roles in managing and distributing urban resources. Customary or traditional authority has been part of the governance structures of many African societies since before settler colonialism (Mamdani, 1996). Many African states at independence maintained the dualist systems of law that were present during the colonial period, which meant that customary law and civil or common law were all applicable at the same time (Ndulo, 2017). Customary authority and forms of governance therefore remain rooted in local institutions within these contexts of legal pluralism (Beall and Ngonyama, 2009).

The exercise of customary authority, however, remains a contested process, partly because the imposition of colonial rule, and the legal systems that were adopted after it, placed customary law and authority at the lowest stratum of the legal system, despite the considerable authority and legitimacy of customary leaders (Ndulo, 2017). Customary authorities have, however, defied systematic suppression and remained relevant in many contexts. The social legitimacy that customary authorities enjoy has bolstered their influence in these hybridised contexts, which sometimes creates tensions between them and formal local authorities (Kanyane, 2017). Where formal state agencies are absent, government authorities will often lean on the legitimacy of the customary authorities to fill in the governance gaps (Marrengane et al., 2021). But their ascendant authority often puts the customary leaders in conflict with elected and appointed state actors, who may view the customary leaders as a threat. It is, however, important that we pay attention to customary leaders as key agents for urban development that influence the distribution of opportunities and resources in the city (Verna and Drummond, 2019).

In conclusion, the literature highlights the challenges faced by informal settlement residents. They face tenure insecurity, a lack of basic services and discriminatory, and stigmatising attitudes. Political elites may provide limited services in exchange for votes (clientelism), make money from the informal provision of services, and evict informal settlers to demonstrate their support for modernist ideals, which reinforces negative attitudes. The literature also identifies the various forms of authority within informal settlements and how these often compete to produce varying outcomes for residents. It points to a need to examine how the various actors exercise authority and what contextual factors make certain actors more powerful than others. ACRC's conceptual framework contributes to both scholarly and policy-oriented debates, by offering a holistic approach to analysing the informal settlements issue. This report applies this analytical framework to informal settlements in seven major African cities, to understand their political and material dimensions, and also shed light on the experiences of informal residents.

3. Methodology

The insights of informal settlement residents with respect to their challenges are significant to this study, given its emphasis on local politics and system failures. This study sought to build on the experiences of Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) where possible, establishing collaborative research approaches with residents who were already familiar with research processes. In six of the seven cities, SDI is active, while in the seventh city (Mogadishu) the research benefited from longstanding engagements between the researchers and community leaders.

3.1. Operationalising collaborative methodologies

Questions of who sets the research agenda and approach, how responsibilities are distributed, and how research benefits will be accessed/distributed are fundamental to any kind of collaborative engagements (Dodsworth and Cheeseman, 2018). Risks are

inherent in exercises that bring together differently situated actors seeking to co-produce interventions to address research priorities. Convening collaborative spaces must first be understood as an exercise of power. Power can be traced in these spaces by looking at who has authority to make decisions or take action, by examining the resource dependencies between the actors, and by interrogating the exercise of discursive power between actors (Purdy and Jones, 2012). Power shapes collaborative processes and outcomes, as it informs beliefs about who owns the processes, and therefore defines expectations on how the collaboration will proceed (Purdy and Jones, 2012). Power is particularly visible in contexts whose histories have been inscribed by colonialism and its consequences, and where research is led by the academic establishment of the global North. It is possible in these contexts to reproduce asymmetries when we fail to contend with certain entrenched structural factors and put in place accessible feedback mechanisms. It is critical for the partners to develop a shared understanding of the research priorities in a mutually respectful environment and acknowledge these power imbalances and their consequences.

A condition for the emergence of meaningful collaborations is the need to acknowledge all partners' legitimate epistemological arenas and recognise that the different research locations have contextual diversity and different agencies may operate with alternative institutional logics. In the global marketplace for knowledge, some perspectives may be muted or discounted which inhibits the understanding of the realities within certain contexts. Musila (2017: 693) uses the term "epistemic disarticulation" to refer to outcomes that result from "the inability to acknowledge multiple modes of knowing and their accompanying indices of credibility". Maintaining the West as the only "seeing eye" has occasioned the muting of important archives of knowledge and has inhibited the emergence of strong, horizontal collaborations that bring on board a diverse range of research partners. There is a Eurocentric bias in the dominant methodologies and theories with which most studies that examine urbanisation in Africa engage (Myers, 2018). Analyses generated from these studies may remain insular to conceptual insights that are grounded in the realities and experiences of the contexts with which they engage (Storper and Scott, 2016). An outcome of this has been the generation of studies lacking in empirical data and which may pay little to no attention to the economic and political structures that inform the urban dynamics which they study (Rizzo, 2017). There is a particular need to decentre northern academic conventions and for affirming the epistemic registers that emerge in contexts which research exercises engage with.

For those who are disadvantaged and who are researching their own situation, there is no distinction between knowledge and action. Unless consciously and directly addressed, this can create a tension between academic research approaches and those of community researchers. Critical social science analysis frequently takes an epistemology which emphasises the structural constraints on progressive reform. Such research findings can be rich in their understandings of elite interests and dominant practices but offer little to an understanding about what can be done; indeed, they may imply that the structural constraints that have been identified are overwhelming. Even

politically attuned critical analysis may provide a plethora of reasons as to why it has been hard to secure more just cities and more effective processes of urban development, and yet offer little guidance on alternative approaches that secure progressive outcomes. For community researchers, these conclusions can be frustrating. Hence, an important question that collaborative research undertakings with community researchers must ask is whether it is possible to find responses to pressing research priorities using the dominant social science methodologies that we have today. There is then a pressing need for theories and methodologies employed to be embedded in the worlds that we study, which can lead to a more politically informed and systemic problem diagnosis to identify and co-create solutions. Transformative methodologies must centre the lived realities and expertise of the communities that the research engages.

There is also an enduring risk of co-optation whenever collaborative spaces between those with unequal social status are convened. This can likely negate the co-productive potential of these spaces. Co-optation is particularly rife in “invited” spaces that are heavily reliant on conceptual apparatuses that are nurtured and framed by powerful external actors. It is a tool for appropriation, as it facilitates the extraction of value from less powerful groups, who in turn gain little from these arrangements (de Sousa Santos, 2016). The role of low-income groups is often reduced to being used as guides and data collectors in studies that have already been designed by academic and civil society elites. Local communities will often be tasked with cosmetic roles as a silencing strategy to maintain entrenched knowledge asymmetries. Co-optation can by itself be a primary impediment to the realisation of the broader political visions that research may seek to achieve, particularly where systemic change is sought. It impedes the roles of local communities as key agents of change, particularly their ability to challenge single-lens conceptions of credible knowledge (Musila, 2017).

There is then a pressing need to challenge structures that are designed to co-opt whenever collaborative spaces are convened. This remains work in progress. It underscores the need for additional avenues to facilitate development of capabilities among community members who are interested in engaging with external research partners. While there are long-established traditions of participatory research, for the most part these are one-off projects. SDI affiliates have invested in developing the capabilities of community members in data collection and analysis, but there have been few opportunities for a more substantive engagement in knowledge generation. ACRC provided those opportunities in this domain. In practice, we found that some city research teams were keener than others to explore this opportunity. More information on each team is provided in the following section.

3.2. Methods and tools

For those research teams involved in this study, a common methodological choice across the cities has been a qualitative approach, combining key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs), in most cases considering elements such as gender, tenure status and other factors, as they relate to group participants. Issues

discussed include the complexity of the political economy of informal settlements, as well as their historical context, the demographics of their inhabitants, their sociopolitical and socioeconomic dynamics, their growth trajectories, the extent of provision for infrastructure and services, housing and land tenure security, and climate change adaptation measures, among other issues. In many cases, the intention was to allow data to “inductively evolve and be refined as the researchers immerse themselves in the data” (Koroma and Refell, 2023). Stakeholder mapping and policy reviews were conducted across the seven cities. Data were then thematically analysed, and emerging themes organised into a comparative analytical framework. Some city teams used mapping exercises. Such is the case with Freetown, where GIS was utilised to create initial mapping of services in the selected informal settlement (IS), and Lilongwe, where the research design included community service mapping.

It is important to clarify that, although some teams differentiate between IS residents registered in SDI Network-affiliated Federations (see Box 2), on the one hand, and non-affiliated community members, on the other, in this paper we use “community members” to refer to any resident of an informal settlement, whether affiliated to a Federation or not. While all cities included communities in their approaches, the level at which they have done so varies. Table 1 summarises the nature of engagement across the seven cities. Limited involvement refers to processes where community members were included as participants of informative, introductory or awareness meetings, or as respondents or data collectors at most. Emergent involvement is where consultations were carried out about specific research elements, such as reviews and validations of tools and data, but decisionmaking still rested mainly on non-community researchers in the teams. Enhanced involvement means at least partial involvement of community members in decisionmaking spaces, such as defining the research questions and methodology, or findings analysis. The most extensive engagement includes all the mentioned criteria, particularly key decisionmaking and leadership roles, and producing outputs in co-authorship (reports, publications, presentations), and disseminating findings for advocacy and activism.

Having community members as part of research teams increases the legitimacy of the process and builds trust with participants. The following quote from Lilongwe the Lilongwe IS domain report describes community members’ involvement in the research process and its benefits:

“The research team had three Federation members ... [who] provided input in the data collection tools developed ... to ensure that the questions asked were relevant to the community at the same time in line with the aims of the research. The Federation leaders also formed part of the revision process of the questionnaires. Youth members from the community also assisted in data collection and service mapping ... community researchers helped in increasing community engagement and trust [and] improved data accuracy and validity...” (Luka et al., 2023: 5).

Several cities have managed to engage, for example, specifically with women and youth groups (for example, Harare), as well as other historically marginalised groups,

such as renters (for example, Kampala and Freetown). Table 1 presents an overview of such involvement.

Table 1: Levels of community involvement in the research process in the seven cities of ACRC's informal settlements domain

Type of participation	Informative			Consultative		Decisionmaking			Co-management		Level of community involvement
Roles Cities	Informative meetings	FGD / KII participants	Data collectors	Tool development or revisions	Data reviews or validation	Research question	Methodology	Data analysis	Output production	Dissemination of findings	
Accra	x	x	x	x	x		x			x	Emergent
Dar es Salaam	x	x	x	x	x	Partially	Partially	Limited		x	Enhanced
Freetown	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	Enhanced
Harare	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Extensive
Kampala	x	x	x	x	x			Partially		x	Emergent
Lilongwe	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	Emergent
Mogadishu	x	x			x					x	Limited

Table 2: Diversity of community involvement in the research process in the seven cities of ACRC's informal settlements domain

Participants Cities	Federation members	Non-Federation	Women	Youth	Elderly	People with disabilities	Land or structure owners / land barons	Tenants	Minoritised ethnicities	Other city-specific groups
Accra	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Food/water vendors, informal waste collectors, toilet managers, entrepreneurs, municipal planning/ environmental officers
Dar es Salaam	Yes, recognised members of selected IS. Especially as trained data collectors	Yes, as respondents	Yes, including a women-only FGD	Yes, mainly as FGD respondents, and dissemination through KYC	Yes, mainly as FGD respondents	Yes, not many, as respondents	Yes, as KII respondents	Yes, KII as respondents	No	Yes, market traders
Freetown	Yes, members of selected IS	Yes, as respondents	Yes, as participants and data collectors	Yes, as respondents and mobilisers	Yes, as respondents	Yes, not many, as respondents	Yes, one of the key criteria for respondents	Yes, one of the key criteria for respondents	No	Yes, female-headed households
Harare	Yes, registered members of selected IS	Yes, from the selected IS. Different level of engagement, due to them not being used to conducting research	Yes, the majority of participants were women.	Yes, with more balanced gender representation and dissemination through KYC	Yes, mainly as FGD respondents	Yes, not many, as respondents	City Council and local governments participate in dissemination workshops. Land barons do not participate, due to their illegal status	Yes, as respondents, and in dissemination meetings	No	Yes, informal community leaders with gatekeeping power
Kampala	Registered members of local network, actively	No	Yes	18-28 years old, living in the selected IS	65+ years old, living in the selected IS	No	Locally recognised individuals with formal	Renters residing in selected IS	No	Market vendors; elected leaders (LCI)

	enrolled savings groups in selected IS						and informal land ownership claims on land parcels occupied by IS			and LCII chairpersons); unelected leaders ("Abataka")
Lilongwe	Registered members of selected IS.	Community governance structures in the selected IS	Yes, women's groups, and quotas from community governance structures	Youth as respondents, and dissemination through KYC	Some inclusion, but not as a deliberate effort	No	Some inclusion, but not as a deliberate effort	Some inclusion, but not as a deliberate effort	Refugees (although hesitant to participate)	No
Mogadishu	Yes, as respondents	Yes, as respondents	Yes, as respondents	Yes, as respondents	Yes, as respondents	Yes, as respondents	Yes, as respondents	Yes, as respondents	Yes, as respondents	Yes, IDPs living in the selected sites

Our approach to systematise and reflect on the information and analyses of the reports from the seven cities in the IS domain involved an iterative process with the corresponding city teams. Early on, we established monthly meetings to share and discuss current work, as well as challenges and questions around next steps. Once the city teams started drafting their reports, we provided comments and discussed feedback individually and collectively, which was subsequently integrated into new drafts, and later into the final versions of the seven city reports. We then identified preliminary emerging themes and presented them on one of our monthly meetings, for early initial comments. Later, we prepared a day-long in-person workshop to discuss a new iteration of the findings with researchers from the seven cities, as part of ACRC's 2023 conference in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. There, we also presented the resulting preliminary findings at a plenary session. As we prepared the final version of this working paper, we conducted follow-up calls with teams to request missing data, clarifications, or to pose questions for further elaboration. We then finalised and shared the first complete draft with two external reviewers, as well as across the city teams, with whom we held a validation and feedback session. Finally, we integrated all comments and feedback received from external reviewers, city researchers and other internal actors, to finalise this paper.

4. Findings

This section summarises key findings from the city studies in four subsections. The first subsection below focuses on the typologies that emerged as significant in explaining the differential success in improving living conditions and securing positive recognition within the broad category of informal settlements. The second subsection focuses on governance (and power) and discusses the actors and agencies present. The third sub-section analyses the nexus between politics and systems. The fourth subsection summarises findings on policies and planning.

4.1. Informal settlements typologies

While there exist some commonalities across informal settlements in the seven cities that we studied, the approach we take eschews problematic generalisations and acknowledges diversity between and within cities. Our analysis in this section draws from the ways in which informality and informal settlements are encountered in the

seven cities. We identify specific reasons why informal settlements form in specific locations. In this subsection, we emphasise the spatial aspect of informal settlements, specifically highlighting the location they occupy within the city. In cases where morphology holds significance, we highlight its usefulness in enhancing the understanding of informal settlements. We do this to lay a foundation for the systems and political engagement analyses that follow. We begin by describing the diversity in individual cities and then summarise our findings in a tabulation with four typologies.

The term “informal settlement” may refer to different phenomena in different cities and may even be used inconsistently within cities. There are also various locally specific terms used for different types of informal settlement. This terminological inconsistency is reflected in the different city analyses (see Table 3). In the seven cities which were studied, the existing forms of informal settlements can be broadly categorised as follows: settlements on customary land (allocated by traditional leaders, rather than through public processes with associated planning regulations) in areas that are amalgamated into the city due to urban expansion; on peri-urban land; on land at high risk of flooding and/or landslides; on public land that was designated for service provision, settled without permission; on serviced land that becomes informal due to a failure to comply with the rules to consolidate housing and services; on private land that is not zoned for residential development; and temporary relocations of residents by the state that have become permanent (Rakodi, 2006). We also acknowledge that informal settlements’ formation is systematically linked to the lack of government commitment to provide an adequate supply of affordable land for the city’s low-income residents.

In the case of Mogadishu, the term “informal settlement” refers to two very different phenomena. On the one hand, some residents use the term to refer to areas where unregulated housing is located, for example, in buildings previously used by the government or spaces reserved for public purposes. These settlements are centrally located in Mogadishu. On the other hand, members of the international development assistance community use the term to refer to internally displaced people’s (IDPs) settlements. These are largely situated in the city’s peripheries, where land is mostly private. Establishment of the IDP settlements usually follows a negotiation process between the landowner and an IDP settlement manager (ISM). Some low-income residents of unregulated housing may self-identify as IDPs in a bid to access humanitarian assistance (Bryld et al., 2020). Leaders may use terms strategically to strengthen group identities and claim political identity. Both IDPs and residents living in unregulated housing experience similar vulnerabilities and stresses.

In Harare, “informal settlement” is an aggregate term to define multiple types of settlement. These types are distinguished by their relationship to the formal status of the housing (or not), and different contraventions related to formal rules. Residents differentiate between: old, degenerating, formal settlements on council land, which includes hostels that were constructed formally but have been occupied informally over time; settlements developed without the requisite permission on (council or state) land zoned for housing development; housing cooperatives whose development has been

politically sanctioned, but have failed to comply with development requirements; housing extensions that have been irregularly established within formally approved spaces, among others. Heterogeneity of settlements is also a common feature in other cities. Table 3 summarises the different types of settlement observed in the cities, based on the process by which households have acquired land.

The analysis presented by the city team from Dar es Salaam uses terminology that highlights both residential density and income diversity. “Consolidated informal settlements” is used to refer to neighbourhoods with densities of up to 40 houses per hectare. “Intermediary informal settlements” refers to those that are fast consolidating without guidance from planning authorities. “Peri-urban informal settlements” in Dar typically include both low- and middle-income households; middle-income households seek access to relatively larger plots for uses that include urban farming (Kalugila, 2014). It is also common to find middle- and low-income households with concrete block housing living side-by-side in unplanned neighbourhoods in Dar es Salaam, such as Bonde la Mpunga.

In Accra, terms used highlight the significance of housing on land held by ethnic groups, with reference to “indigenous informal settlements” (Afrane, 2013). Accra residents also refer to “unauthorised sub-division”, meaning settlements on the peripheries of the city formed through the subdivision of large agricultural lands into residential plots for housing construction, without recourse to planning regulations (Gaisie et al., 2018).

Table 3: Typology of informal settlements in the seven cities included in ACRC IS domain

City	1. Settlements on traditional or peri-urban land which, over time, have become incorporated or form part of the city.	2. Formal settlements that have grown beyond intended residential capacity with informal extensions or tenancy over time. Informal extensions may be formed by squatting or sale of land not zoned for residential use.	3. Settlements that have developed on public or private land that has been irregularly occupied.	4. Settlements established by some state authority on a “temporary” basis without formal status ever being given.
Accra	Referred to as “indigenous informal settlement”. Examples are Chorkor, Ga Mashie, Bukom, Osu Alata. Land rights continue to be held by traditional leaders, who may sell or subdivide land parcels over which they hold authority. The state does not provide services.	Emerged from influx into existing formal settlements, resulting in unauthorised growth with no extension of services.	Land frequently occupied with tacit political approval. Mainly occupied by distinct ethnic groups from northern Ghana. Limited services, mostly self-provided.	
Dar es Salaam	Referred to as “peri-urban informal settlements”. Largely occupied by low-income households who cannot afford land in core city areas (also by some middle-income households, seeking larger plots for urban farming, for instance).	Referred to as “consolidated informal settlements”. Characterised by housing on plots with densities of up to 40 houses per hectare.	Referred to as “intermediary informal settlements”. Rapidly consolidating, with no role of planning authorities.	

Freetown		Formally established settlements which have become dilapidated over time, due to lack of maintenance.		
Harare	Peri-urban settlements with unclear jurisdiction, such as Churu Farm and Caledonia.	Old, degenerating, formal settlements on council land, (including hostels, such as Mbare, constructed formally but occupied informally over time); housing extensions irregularly established within formally approved spaces.	IS developed without permission on (council or state) land zoned for housing development, such as Crowborough Paddocks and Dzivarasekwa Extension.	Housing cooperatives, the establishment of which has been politically sanctioned, but which have failed to comply with requirements. Also historically formed holding camps, such as certain parts of Dzivarasekwa, and Heathcliff.
Kampala			Kisenyi was once a wetland near the Buganda King's palace; some of the King's servants (the <i>bakopi</i>) settled here and it developed "organically" because it lay outside the colonially administered part of Kampala; over time, it expanded into what is now known as Kisenyi and is divided into the three zones: Kisenyi I, Kisenyi II, and Kisenyi III; Katwe is another informal settlement with similar beginnings; Katoogo informal settlement was built on part of a gazetted wetland and is therefore considered illegal by the city government and NEMA.	Settlements in proximity to the parliament of Buganda kingdom, the Kabaka's palace, and other Buganda Government offices, which organically sprouted as settlements for the king's servants, the <i>bakopi</i> . These include Kisenyi III and Katwe.
Lilongwe	Villages in previous rural areas that have been incorporated into the urban setting.	Some cases of resettlements by the government, such as the case of Mtandire, which the government relocated from a different area that had to be redeveloped. Initially included limited services, but did not cater further or for new influxes of people.	Most of this research's cases fall in this category. Mgoni and Senti are on private land, and Kaliyeka is on public land.	
Mogadishu			Settlements located in government-owned spaces (most in the city centre), abandoned after Somali government collapse. Low-income communities live separately from IDPs; settlements in non-developed pockets of city land, or spaces that should be public utility areas, such as road reserves. A few on private land.	IDP settlements in the periphery. Majority of land privately owned, and settlements leased out to IDPs to settle for a period of time negotiated between owner and IDP settlement manager. More densely populated, with a majority of residents from southern Somalia. Some non-IDP residents as well, due to (un)affordability of housing.

From this analysis of typologies, the development opportunities associated with specific informal settlements are closely tied to the category of land on which the settlements are located. There are settlements that have emerged and developed on customary land and in which customary leaders continue to exert considerable authority and are able to exert their authority to influence residents' access to some basic services. Increasing land values, as a result of the expansion of the city to these formerly peripheral localities, are key drivers of conflicts. Customary authorities in settlements

like Amui Dzor in Accra often influence local authorities to carry out evictions. The settlements are frequently not recognised by formal authorities, in part due to power contestations between customary and formal leadership structures. Formal settlements that have grown beyond the intended residential capacity are indicative of the housing pressure that is a defining feature in the seven cities that were surveyed. This pressure surpasses any capacity that planning authorities may have to address or cater for rapidly consolidating settlements, in spaces occupied either with or without unspoken political permission, both on public and privately owned land. This applies to government-established “temporary” settlements as well, where formalisation has not featured, and pressure to access housing has led to the consolidation of housing contrary to existing planning directives. It has also attracted a regeneration gaze, as a result of their proximity to city centres, as is the case with Mabare and Mji Mpya informal settlements in Harare and Dar es Salaam, respectively.

These typologies highlight the significance of the political agencies and individuals involved (customary leaders, relocation agencies) and the nature of the commitment to the development of the areas. It highlights that there is a very different “social contract” for those settling in these neighbourhoods, with implications for both tenure security and access to essential services. The following subsection discusses issues of power and governance.

4.2. Power and governance in informal settlements

Governance in the informal settlements is typically multilayered – comprising formal, informal and customary (semi-formal) layers. Three groups typically emerge as having substantive authority – state agents, politicians and customary leaders. Other policy and social actors that are relevant to informal settlements range from professionals engaged in managing informal settlements, to NGOs, private sector actors and grassroots or citizen groups. Microfinance agencies, cooperatives and trade associations of informal vendors or service providers are also present in informal settlements. Cooperatives have played significant roles in collective land acquisition by residents. Donor agencies maintain significant presence in informal settlements and are involved in various roles like infrastructural development.

4.2.1. *National and sub-national authorities*

The state, at both national and sub-national levels, exercises considerable formal authority, especially in contexts where it is tasked with service provision. State actors in this case include municipal agencies, members of parliament (MPs), government ministers and officials from various state departments. Municipal authorities are important formal actors that undertake various activities in informal settlements, such as upgrading, regularisation and evictions. The Lilongwe City Council (LCC) is one example that is legally mandated with delivering socioeconomic development for the residents of Lilongwe. LCC has commenced the process of mass land regularisation to address the problem of tenure insecurity. It has also partnered with the Centre for Community Organisation and Development (CCODE) to deliver basic services. For

example, CCODE, with municipal support, is training residents of Kaliyeka informal settlements to set up and train 130 water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) committee members. LCC is working directly with the community in Kaliyeka to clear six irregular dumping sites. However, the LCC struggles to deliver substantive development to its residents, due to factors like deeprooted political interference, overlapping mandates in the legal and regulatory framework, and low revenue collection. The council's precarious financial situation means it cannot realistically meet the expectations of its residents, nor can it provide services at a meaningful, impactful level. The national government appoints senior staff in the LCC, leaving councillors frustrated at their lack of power and influence. Hence, in both cities, national governments use various strategies to influence local outcomes.

In Freetown, power struggles are rampant between the central government and Freetown City Council (FCC), in an attempt to subordinate the City Council. Service provision by FCC is hampered by limited resources and the incomplete decentralisation of authority from the national government to local authorities. FCC's attempts at reforming Freetown's property tax system have been frustrated by the central government, which has inhibited its ability to collect revenue and deliver services.⁵ Recent attempts by FCC to assume regulatory powers for urban planning and land management have also been frustrated by the central government. Researchers in Freetown note that FCC's limited powers, particularly regarding land and property tax levy determination, makes it difficult for the council to set up a land use planning and management system. To address the funding shortfalls, the FCC mayor has tapped into external networks, like the Global Cities Fund for Inclusive Pandemic Response, to access funding for waste collection services in informal settlements. This is an important tool that has been mobilised by local authorities in what Resnick (2014) describes as contexts of "vertically-divided" authority. Power contestations at a horizontal level are also prevalent in Kampala, with control of resources like land being a key feature in the disputes among local council (LC) chairpersons, as illustrated in the box below.

Box 1: Local power contestations in Kampala's informal settlements

Local Council 1 (LC 1) chairpersons endorse informal land transactions, from which they reportedly earned at least 20% in commissions of the agreed exchange value between buyers and vendors. They also charged fees (in the form of "stamp" duty) for preparing and endorsing recommendation letters which were among the compulsory requirements for individuals applying for important documents, including passports, national identity cards, driving permits, birth/marriage/death certificates, tax identification numbers (TIN), employment references, and so on. Evictions rarely took place without the knowledge of the LC 1 chairpersons. To the outsider, the above seemingly mundane roles and responsibilities offer little value in terms of real tangible power. However, to those living in the informal settlements, these "trappings of power"

⁵ See Africanews and AFP (2023).

conferred significant opportunities and possibilities, which made the LC 1 chairperson position and office so highly coveted. For instance, cases of outgoing LC 1 chairpersons refusing to hand over their official stamps to their successors were reportedly increasing. In one prominent case, an incumbent LC 1 chairperson feared losing his seat and the benefits that came with it to a formidable rival with a growing support base. To protect his position, the incumbent negotiated with his rival to split the contested territory into two distinct domains of influence for both to oversee. The rival withdrew his candidacy and the incumbent was re-elected. Subsequently, the two men followed the prior settlement, where, officially, there was one recognised chairperson for the one settlement but, in practice, the position was split between the two leaders controlling two “territories” in the same settlement.

Source: (Kasajja et al., 2023).

The second group with significant authority is politically aligned individuals operating within informal structures. These may have a status within the political party but they are not democratically elected. While specific arrangements differ across the cities, these individuals extract financial resources from residents through controlling access to services. In many neighbourhoods, they are linked to party political structures beyond the neighbourhood and are involved in the acquisition of state resources to improve access to services within the neighbourhood. Such linkages may involve payments from the residents (managed by the leader) and/or votes to enable political elites to remain in or acquire electoral success. Most of these local leaders gain their position through controlling access to resources (housing, water, land).

4.2.2. Customary leadership

Thirdly, in Accra, Freetown, Lilongwe and Mogadishu, customary leadership structures, such as hereditary chiefs, are significant. Most of these leaders have some degree of connection with elite politicians. Indeed, the legitimacy and authority of these local-level political formations is, in part, derived from national political leaders and from statutory laws. In Accra, customary leaders have historically played significant roles in the governance of settlements, as a result of Ghana’s legal plurality. The indirect rule system introduced by the British colonial administration put traditional leaders at the helm of affairs in Ghana. This system of governance was later adopted by successive independent administrations in Ghana, which have continued to elevate the roles of the customary leaders. Customary leaders have therefore never been fully informal but have always played formal and quasi-formal roles. The analysis highlights that their governing role derives in part from their social status.

The authority exerted by customary leadership also derives from the absence of other state agencies, which leaves customary leadership as the only functioning governance structure. They benefit from, and are further empowered by, residents using them to access state services, and can use their positions to advance their own interests and expand their responsibilities. In Freetown, customary leaders have long been considered to be more responsive to the needs of settlements than elected officials,

due to their close proximity to residents. Indeed, “elected officials are rarely trusted as much as community chiefs, who are often considered as ‘insiders’, despite their lack of formal influence over development resources or processes” (Koroma et al., 2022: 15-16). In these neighbourhoods, customary authorities mobilise communities around issues relating to community development. Additionally, the very localised nature of dispute resolution in Freetown’s informal settlements has made the authority of customary leadership more visible. Customary authorities may exercise gatekeeping roles to maintain their personal position. In Accra, to ensure that the Amui Dzor housing project was successful, the Ghana Federation of the Urban Poor (GHAFUP) negotiated with the traditional council in the settlements to secure land for the project, and even took members of the said council to India on an exchange visit to see similar housing projects.

The authority of customary leadership structures is changing with the changing demographics of cities. In Accra, settlements like Chorkor, Ga Mashie, Bukom and Osu Alata emerged as a result of housing development by ethnic groups indigenous to the localities. As Accra becomes more urbanised, there is bound to be increased settlement of other ethnic groups into such previously homogenous neighbourhoods. This must have a bearing on the nature of authority exercised by customary leaders and potentially generate tensions in these settlements.

4.2.3. Residents, interest-based groups and reform coalitions

Residents also exercise considerable authority in the spaces that they occupy, either individually or collectively through associations. Collective action is also visible through citizen groups and reform coalitions that emerge to tackle various issues in informal settlements. Urban reform coalitions are characterised by diverse groups of stakeholders joining forces to pursue a common goal (Tarrow, 2005). Interest groups often form around particular issues that affect specific groups. For instance, upgrading of services may be catalysed and facilitated by organised residents who are frustrated by the lack of provision and who self-organise to address their needs. Freetown’s informal settlement residents have organised themselves into community groups and community-based organisations (CBOs), which they use to advocate for various issues. Additionally, community chairs are elected across Freetown and tasked with coordinating development efforts in informal settlements. These representatives are not affiliated to political parties and have set up various committees through which the development needs of the community are channelled for collective action. In Harare, residents of settlements that have developed on illegally occupied public or private land, such as Crowborough Paddocks, have collectively engaged the city for regularisation. Collective action by residents is an important tool that is employed to advance various causes.

In some cities, as a result of threats of evictions and non-provision of basic services by city authorities, residents have been mobilised to create formal organisations which they collectively use to articulate their issues and codevelop interventions together with state agencies. Notable in the cities are platforms that enable concerned groups to

come together and discuss informal settlement upgrading policies and programmes, along with other relevant issues. One such platform is SDI (see Box 2) – an important network of grassroots federations active across Africa and Asia. The work of SDI is exemplified in Freetown, where residents have set up community structures such as the SDI-affiliated Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP), supported by the NGO Centre for Dialogue on Human Settlements and Poverty Alleviation (CODOHSAPA). The roles of these actors in Freetown are rarely recognised by state agencies, in part due to some of them being unregistered. SDI's organising modalities help residents to strengthen their voice.

Box 2: Slum Dwellers International (SDI)

SDI is a network of community-based organisations of the low-income urban communities in 32 countries and hundreds of cities and towns across Africa, Asia and Latin America. SDI seeks to transform slums into resilient neighbourhoods and facilitate inclusive cities by collectively driving a women-led, bottom-up change agenda for securing tenure and increasing access to basic services, housing and livelihoods.

In each country where SDI has a presence, slum dwellers come together at the community, city and national level to form federations of low-income residents. These federations share specific methodologies and strategies to address key development concerns in their communities. Each federation works together with a local NGO, as their professional support organisation, and together they constitute the National Affiliate.

As a lead innovator in the field of community-driven slum upgrading in the global South, over the past 20 years SDI has built a global slum dweller movement that brings together over a million slum dweller households into savings groups that prioritise the central participation of women, building trust and collective capacity. SDI savings groups are networked at the settlement, city, national and international levels to create a global slum dweller movement that takes its direction from its members. They represent unique social capital and networks for implementation of development activities and advocacy.

SDI and its affiliates have received a number of prestigious awards, including the World Habitat Award, the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship, Roman Magsaysay Award, the Sarphati Sanitation Award, the UN Habitat Scroll of Honour, Rockefeller Innovation Award, the Padma Shri award and a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

In Freetown, the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre has instigated a City Learning Platform that facilitates these discussions on challenges facing informal settlements and strategies for tackling them. FCC has also collaborated with interest groups to reduce exposure to disasters, hazards and vulnerability in coastal and hillside informal settlements. In Harare, there is a reform coalition called the Urban Informality Forum, established by Dialogue on Shelter (DoS), the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation (ZHPF) and Development Governance Institute (DEGI), which have had a

longstanding collaboration around pro-poor urban development issues. The Forum facilitates the understanding and resolution of urban informality issues. The Urban Action Lab at Makerere University in Kampala has played a similar role, demonstrating the value of involving academics in evidence-based policy advocacy to both local and central government.

In Accra, there are many interest-based groups and coalitions that are organised around specific interests within informal settlements. The notable ones are the trade associations like the scrap dealers' association, religious-based groups, ethnic/tribal groups, political party groups, and a host of other development-oriented groups. These are all community-based and their level of interest and involvement in national political activities is not significant or pronounced because of their fragmented nature. In Lilongwe, such reform efforts are led by government agencies and are commonly referred to as technical working groups (TWGs). These are usually located at the city and national levels and have tended to be project-based and therefore constituted for short periods of time. Reform coalitions in Lilongwe have also been formed to respond to specific issues around water and waste management and citizen participation in urban governance.

There is, however, a limit to what residents can achieve on their own or through reform coalitions that do not have state institutions as significant players, due to the scale of resources required to establish fora and implement interventions. Additionally, while community self-organisation is a means through which people in poverty and vulnerability situations can work to effect change in their communities, patterns of exclusion are frequently reproduced. Dominant actors and institutions may drive the agenda to the exclusion of those with limited power. In Freetown, an FGD conducted by city researchers confirmed that women are often left out of various community processes. In Lilongwe, it is noted that:

“due to deep-rooted patriarchal systems, the committees are dominated by men, leaving women and girls on the sidelines. Women and girls' participation in community activities is often confined to supportive or social roles. While these are comparatively well organised, their relegation to the role of support and mobilisation means they ultimately do not bolster women's influence or leadership. This exclusion means that women and girls are not involved in important decisionmaking that affects their lives” (Luka et al., 2023: 29).

The complexities of political leadership and competing power claims in informal settlements make it difficult to form reform coalitions. Unresolved land tenure questions also hinder the effectiveness of reform coalitions, which is the case in Harare, where government officials are said to be dismissive of groups that emerge in settlements situated on illegally occupied land.

Box 3 summarises interactions between elites and municipal government in one Dar es Salaam informal neighbourhood.

Box 3: Mapping out actors in Makongo Juu settlement in Kinondoni Municipality in Dar es Salaam

Within Makongo Juu settlement, located at Kinondoni Municipality, CCM is the most significant political party at the sub-ward level. The Mtaa (neighbourhood) officials have rented an office, with costs being covered by contributions from KamatiyaUboreshajiwaMakaziya Makongo Juu (KAUMAMA), a CBO that led and advocated for land regularisation in 2017. The municipal government has not built a Mtaa office nor are they paying the rent. Local elites, some of them retired civil servants from various government institutions, including the universities, are key supporters of the Mtaa. Mtaa leaders usually go to them when they need financial and other forms of support.

The role of the elite is crucial in shaping the affairs of the settlement. These elites have been championing initiatives, including advocating for community-based regularisation programmes and road and drainage improvement. Individuals, the municipal government and central government companies such as SONGAS (TPDC) provide financing for various community projects, such as regularisation of land. The government through TANROAD is currently building a road from Ardhi University to Goba, passing through Makongo Juu, and has plans to improve the feeder roads in the neighbourhood. SONGAS is supporting schools in the sub-ward.

Source: (Ndezi et al., 2023).

4.2.4. International development agencies and NGOs

Both international agencies such as the World Bank and Northern and Southern NGOs are active in the discourse about informal settlements and their improvement, drawing on their work to aid and address shortfalls in service provision. They may work to promote social or political change locally or on a broad national scale, and they play important roles in monitoring government performance and advocating for improvements where necessary. In Harare, the informal settlements of Caledonia, Churu farm, Crowborough Paddocks, Stoneridge and Dzivarasekwa Extension have seen a multiplicity of actors, like the Slum Dwellers International (SDI)-affiliated Zimbabwe Homeless Peoples' Federation⁶ (ZIHOPFE) with their NGO partner, Dialogue on Shelter, and others, such as GOAL, UNICEF and Community Water Alliance. Efforts are often not coordinated, which leaves them vulnerable to having their activities controlled by powerful actors in the ruling ZANU PF. Neighbourhood and city politicians may feel threatened by external agencies entering territories that they control for income generation and/or to further their political interests. ZANU PF has proposed laws to restrict the activities of NGOs that operate across Zimbabwe (Nhapi,

⁶ In all cases where "federations" exist, they are affiliated to the global network of slum dwellers, Slum Dwellers International.

2009; Musemwa, 2021; McGregor and Chatiza, 2020; Muchadenyika and Williams, 2020.

In Freetown, international NGOs active in informal neighbourhoods include: Concern Worldwide, BRAC-SL, Save the Children, Caritas, CARE International and GOAL. In Mogadishu, development actors like the World Bank and the UN are involved in policy development and humanitarian support, especially in IDP settlements. Programmes initiated by the Somali Federal Government through the Durable Solutions Secretariat (DSS) under the Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development (MoPIED) are largely implemented by Western development agencies. In Mogadishu, non-state development actors are very prominent, mainly due to the weak capacity of the Somali state to provide for IDPs and informal settlements residents. Additionally, the clans that feature in Mogadishu make sure low-income residents of unregulated housing areas have preferential access to services, compared to those in IDP settlements. Most of the clans to which the IDPs belong have limited power in Hawiye-dominated Mogadishu.

The range of actors highlighted in this section is confirmation that informal settlements remain loci for the expression of power in African cities and are sites where various interests emerge and compete. Competition over authority affects service provision, as the Freetown example shows. It is also an attempt by various authorities to legitimise themselves, particularly where their influence is threatened. This is seen mainly amongst customary authorities, who continue to exert considerable influence over the distribution of various resources. The above accounts also show that the roles of customary leaders have never been fully informal; these actors have always played formal and quasi-formal roles. The absence of formal authorities in informal settlements will continue to give customary leaders the space to exert considerable influence within the settlements. Examples have also shown that residents of informal settlements strategically exercise authority in the settlements, either individually or through associations, and reform coalitions, though their efforts may have limited effect where state actors are not involved.

The following sub-section discusses access to essential services and how this is influenced by the power dynamics in informal settlements.

4.3. Nexus with city systems

Addressing the needs of residents living in informal settlements requires an analysis of the systems that sustain and/or improve urban life. As discussed above, these systems are inseparable from political economy and politics. Key systems for informal settlement residents are those related to infrastructure and services, as well as tenure. Due to the nature of such systems (significant for wellbeing and subject to market forces/failures), states have to take responsibility for managing them, even if they choose to sub-contract delivery to voluntary and private agencies. States matter for other reasons, too. Across the seven cities, politics is central to service provision and access; that is, service fragmentation and neglect is to some extent not accidental, but

is aligned to the ways in which elites advance their interests. System outcomes reflect both political economics and politics. Political elites may earn money through the formal and informal provision of basic services and housing, and through land speculation. Political elites also use the provision of services to win elections. System outcomes are deeply dependent on politics for these reasons, as well as being dependent on state capacity.

The varying nature of systems outcomes across informal settlements is also influenced by residents' ability to collectively mobilise and navigate formal and non-formal authority. Residents make "pragmatic calculations" (Mitlin, 2018), in order to secure land and basic services. In settlements where customary authorities wield significant influence, residents may use them as channels to access distant elected officials and state agencies. Elected elites are also more inclined to reach compromises with organised residents with regards to how services are provided in the settlements. In Kampala, residents of Katoogo mobilised other actors to convince KCCA to allow for provision of portable toilets as a compromise to the establishment of permanent facilities, which KCCA viewed as likely to legitimise residents' occupation of the settlements. Similar negotiations have happened in Dar es Salaam, which led to the establishment of a simplified sewer system. In Nairobi, residents of Mukuru informal settlements mobilised and triggered a declaration of their settlements by the county government as a special planning area, which facilitated investments in sanitation, health facilities and other amenities.

In this section, we present the findings with respect to system failings and fragmentation, distinguishing five types/causes of service delivery failure:

- There is political neglect; in this case it appears that elites and decisionmakers do not find the system failure politically significant or relevant and are therefore not incentivised to take action.
- There is political self-interest, with elites and decisionmakers being politically advantaged by the system failure and therefore not incentivised to take action.
- There are declining capabilities in various state agencies, which impact their ability to provide *individual* services.
- Even when there is a desire to develop *integrated* services, state agencies may exhibit inefficiency in their delivery.
- Citizens aspire for better service provision and have developed strategies for collective action to negotiate with state actors, but the scale of service provision shortfalls makes it difficult for these initiatives to be successful.

Astonishingly little attention is given to these causes, in a context in which there are significant failings for individual services. Different cities face different "pinch points" in service delivery. Different cities and services also face a different mix of formal and informal providers. Even within a city, infrastructure and service provision will operate differently at different locations and scales. For instance, waste collected from informal settlements may be removed and taken to different contexts with different actors and separate policy regimes. There is also a likelihood that policy might have been

structured to respond to the specific needs across the existing scales. However, these problematics are also potential entry points from where interventions to address systems shortfalls can be addressed. Understanding these problematics and engaging with place-specific conditions which influence them is a good starting point for any policy interventions that should be proposed to address them.

The figure below summarises perspectives on basic services challenges, followed by a brief discussion of some system failures and how politics influences service provision.

Figure 3: Service provision challenges



4.3.1. Access to energy

Access to energy remains a key challenge for inhabitants of informal settlements and is needed both for social reproduction and enterprise-related activities. Challenges in access primarily arise from the exclusionary policies that state agencies and utility providers continue to adopt towards IS residents. Research in Accra has established that access to energy by IS residents is hindered by both physical and legal barriers. The lack of tenure security and the unplanned nature of informal settlements in Accra have been used to disqualify residents from acquiring formal residential addresses, which is a prerequisite to accessing electricity supply from the city. As a result, there are illegal/unapproved connections that have been established to cater for the energy

needs of the inhabitants. In Mogadishu, IS residents enjoy better access to electricity than IDP residents, due to their proximity to the grid and service providers. To cope with shortfalls, both those living in unregulated housing and IDP residents resort to burning wastepaper and plastic for cooking, exposing them to serious environmental and safety hazards.

Residents in Harare IS have had to establish alternative off-grid solutions to their energy challenges. These kinds of interventions are possible in settlements with relatively lower densities and where there is space for the establishment of these amenities. The informal settlements of Caledonia, Churu Farm, Crowborough Paddocks and Stoneridge have seen a steady increase in the use of solar, firewood and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). The use of alternatives like firewood generates other health and environmental challenges. Interventions to address the challenges of energy poverty have been implemented in Freetown. At least 1,500 IS households and micro-enterprises have been provided with innovative clean cooking solutions through the Enabling African Cities for Transformative Energy Access project (ENACT), implemented by ICLEI Africa and Energy4Impact, with support from FCC. The approach adopted by this project combines clean cooking technologies with an energy risk reduction education programme to provide adequate, safe, reliable, clean and affordable forms of energy and services for households and micro-enterprises in Freetown's IS.

A further common challenge is evident in Dar es Salaam, where waste management in informal settlements is left to contractors that are approved by the municipalities to undertake solid waste collection within the settlements. These contractors only collect from areas that are easily accessible, such as along the roads. Large sections of the informal settlements do not have services. There are widespread perceptions among the communities that these contractors are inefficient. Despite the numerous complaints by the aggrieved communities, little has been done to ensure that the contractors discharge their contractual obligations, and there is widespread speculation of possible connections between the political elite and the contractors. In Accra as well, there are allegations of corruption and underhand dealings in the waste management sector, which generates grievances within the communities. The contracting regime for waste management services in Dar es Salaam and Accra has left out informal waste collectors, who play critical roles within the settlements.

4.3.2. Water and sanitation

Sanitation is a further common issue. In Harare IS, pit latrines and pour flush toilets that are connected to septic tanks are the most common toilet facilities. However, residents of Caledonia, Churu Farm, Crowborough Paddocks, and Stoneridge consider these to be health hazards, given the fact that most of the inhabitants access water from the shallow wells in the settlements. In Freetown, the "pay-per-use" system of public sanitation inhibits access for most inhabitants, who cannot afford the costs associated with accessing these facilities. In Mogadishu, humanitarian actors alleviate the cost challenge by providing water and sanitation amenities for free in IDP

settlements. However, many IDP residents are left without assistance and are unable to pay for services.

Where there is lane sanitation, a further challenge is the high cost of connections with the trunk sewer networks, whenever these are provided by utility providers. In Dar es Salaam, the Centre for Community Initiatives (CCI) collaborated with the Dar Water Supply and Sanitation Authority (DAWASA) to address affordability, and a simplified sewerage system (SSS) was implemented in 2015. However, challenges of affordability, maintenance and governance remain (Yap et al., 2023). The project's significance is illustrated in Box 4, below.

Box 4: Vingunguti simplified sewer system (SSS)

The SSS was first implemented in 2015 as a low-cost sanitation approach for low-income communities living in Vingunguti informal settlements, and currently connects 140 toilets there, as well as an additional 30 in Kambo settlements. It is itself connected to utility wastewater stabilisation ponds (Vingunguti DAWASA ponds), with DAWASA providing technical advice and subsidising financial contributions for pipe networks and toilet improvements.

The issue of tariff affordability has been one of concern and trade-off. In this regard, there has been an ongoing discussion between the stakeholders, including the community beneficiary, DAWASA, EWURA, Mtaa officials and CCI.

The initial setting of tariff was at Tshs 2,500, which was increased to Tshs 3,500. However, some beneficiaries started to receive a monthly bill on the sanitation services of Tsh 18,900/=. While other beneficiaries have been receiving a monthly bill of about Tshs 7,280/=. The lack of consistency in the tariff setting has created fear among the community. Despite these challenges, CCI as an intermediary NGO in the process has worked hard with all stakeholders, including DAWASA and EWURA, who have reworked the formula to allow the community who have connected to the simplified sewerage to pay an average monthly bill of Tshs 5,500, which is now being accepted. The simplified sewerage project, which was initiated by CCI, has been accepted by the utility (DAWASA). Discussions highlighted an increase in rents in the neighbourhood.

Affordability remains a serious challenge that has to be recognised, alongside issues of maintenance and governance.

Source: Ndezi et al., 2023; Yap et al., 2023.

Informal settlement residents in Lilongwe highlighted the issue of access to water from kiosks that have been set up in the settlements. The Lilongwe Water Board (LWB) supplies water in informal settlements through water kiosks. In some cases, families have connected taps to their yards, which reduces their reliance on the water kiosks. Management of the water kiosks is done through water users associations (WUAs). These entities are structured as community–public partnerships (CPPs). However, the design of the kiosks did not consider the lack of affordability in many neighbourhoods.

The responsible committees frequently add to charges to cover payments to committee members. Faced with high costs (buying water from the kiosks may be relatively expensive compared to water piped to yards), residents have bought relatively little. As a coping mechanism, some families in the settlements will source cooking and drinking water from the kiosks and resort to shallow wells and nearby polluted rivers for other uses. Consequently, some kiosks are not viable and have closed. An additional problem is an irregular water supply. Use of contaminated water is also prevalent in Freetown IS, as a result of the shortfalls in formal provision. The steep hills in Moyiba, coupled with the poor transport network, makes it challenging for inhabitants to access water, even with the use of motorised transport.

4.3.3. Solid waste management

Freetown presents a case where the lack of well-planned and regulated waste management is linked to health challenges for informal settlement communities. The lack of capacity by the FCC to manage waste at the community level worsens the already hazardous conditions in which informal settlement dwellers live. In Lilongwe, the LCC limits waste collection services to formally recognised settlements, which leaves informal settlements without service provision. As a result, most informal settlement households dispose of waste in waste pits dug within their plots on the roadside, while other households throw waste on the riverside. In Mogadishu, most services are provided by the private sector, which is costly for residents, and prohibitively so for those with low incomes (World Bank, 2020). Those living in unregulated housing and IDPs tend to be low income, meaning their access to services is minimal. All these have detrimental health implications for residents.

In Ghana, there are problems of rampant flooding in Accra and Tema, which have been associated with the lack of proper solid waste disposal mechanisms. Various respondents attributed this to the government's failure to provide proper infrastructure, coupled with changes in climatic conditions. Despite the Ghanaian government's plan to put in place mechanisms to transform informal settlements (like Old Fadama) that experience regular flooding, failure to implement the plans has left these settlements vulnerable – a condition that has often been used to justify relocating the residents, rather than upgrading the settlement. Even in cases where there are some forms of established infrastructure, failure by the government to invest in them has led to their rapid deterioration. In Harare, deteriorating infrastructure is a common feature in settlements like Mbare hostels, which accommodate approximately 70,000 people in overcrowded conditions with limited access to basic services.

4.3.4. The politics of service provision

In Kampala, clientelist relations that emerge as a result of patronage networks influence inhabitants' access to basic services such as WASH and solid waste management. The emergence of these patronage networks was accelerated by the shifts in governance mandates, particularly with the establishment of KCCA in 2011, which recentralised decisionmaking powers and handed them to the KCCA's executive

director, leaving them unchecked. The fact that provision of WASH and solid waste management services in Kampala's IS involves multiple actors with diverse interests has also created ground for constant wrangles, resulting in unequal, inadequate and inefficient service delivery. Spaces through which aggrieved inhabitants could channel their grievances have increasingly been closed, as KCCA tries to advance its vision for an "international city". Box 5 describes how residents of one neighbourhood have used political affiliation as a route to protect themselves from forced eviction by either the KCCA or NEMA (National Environmental Management Authority).

Box 5: The political value of Kampala's informal settlements: The case of Katoogo, Ggaba

Katoogo, which forms part of the larger Ggaba informal settlement, is a small enclave carved out of a sprawling wetland along the Lake Victoria waterfront. It is home to about 4,000 residents, according to the LC1 chairperson of this zone. NEMA considers the settlement illegal because all the structures and other associated developments in this settlement have advanced beyond the established beacons into the wetland, an important element of the lake's natural hydrological ecosystem. Residents had significantly altered the site by in-filling and wetland vegetation removal. Therefore, all the residents in Katoogo were considered "illegal" and NEMA reportedly made occasional visits every year to remind them to evacuate from the area. This was corroborated by a local resident who claimed that:

"It [the land] belongs to NEMA – that is what they told us and they are the ones who come here to check on it ... they [NEMA] come back every year and tell us to leave ... in a year like three times, they [NEMA] come with megaphones and they announce telling us to leave ..."



The residents were apparently aware of their illegal status and positioned themselves as NRM voters to manipulate the formal structures and processes in their favour. The LC1 chairperson's office was strategically located at the entrance to the settlement and painted yellow – the NRM party colour – as a very conspicuous signal to potential state officials. The location of the office is a strong warning against possible eviction

attempts by any state agencies. Because they identified themselves as poor, landless NRM voters, it became politically expedient to leave the settlement alone. Therefore, NEMA and KCCA could not remove them from the wetland.

Source: Kasaija et al. (2023).

Residents' strategies for collective action have grown in scale and sophistication over the past two decades. Residents are aware that politicians need to demonstrate their capability to address shortfalls in services in informal settlements and this has provided grounds for more action by residents, who mobilise themselves and demand action from politicians. Politicians make strategic calculations to gain support from residents. In Accra, whenever there is a fire outbreak in an informal settlement, politicians visit the settlements to show sympathy with the affected individuals and in the process distribute food and clothing. Even in these clientelist arrangements, residents display creativity in negotiating with elites, which enables them to access critical services. The increasingly competitive electoral context gives slum dwellers leverage to demand their democratic dividend (Paller, 2018), while also restraining political elites from the forceful evictions of slum residents, due to fears of the electoral consequences (Gillespie, 2017).

In Mogadishu, even though IDPs and IS residents experience similar vulnerabilities and stresses, they may adopt "IDP" and "IS resident" as distinct identities, where useful to navigate stigma and access services or claim rights (Bryld et al., 2020), or as a way of claiming political identity.

For IDPs who lived alongside urban poor in the city proper, it quickly became clear that there was a need to develop a mechanism to govern/manage them, and IDPs selected their own representatives, primarily along clan lines. It is important to note here that, up to early 2000s, when IDPs started relocating to the periphery, all those residing in informal settlements, be they urban poor or IDPs, were all categorised as "IDPs". Their living conditions and level of deprivation was much the same; and some urban poor identified as IDPs as this gave them access to humanitarian assistance when it became available. (Kamau et al., 2023: 22).

As illustrated in Box 5 above, residents of Katoogo, in the informal settlements of Ggaba in Kampala, strategically identified themselves as poor, landless NRM voters to avoid eviction from the wetland they had settled and to negotiate for access to basic services. In Accra, the city authority is legally prevented from operating and providing services in Old Fadama, but a tacit understanding has emerged, whereby official resources can be funnelled from the city to the Old Fadama Development Association (OFADA), in order to let them perform a role in governance. OFADA is a community representative body that was initiated by Peoples Dialogue in 2005 and has operated for over 20 years now.

The strategies they use are time-tested community-based principles of regular meetings to collect information about themselves, mobilise and organise residents for dialogue sessions with city authorities and other development partners for tenure security, infrastructure improvement, especially basic services. Tactically, leadership of OFADA

rotates to align with the ruling political party at the national level to allow for ruling political party activists to be the leaders of OFADA, thus reducing potential conflict. According to OFADA, this is a pragmatic strategy to facilitate smooth negotiations and cooperation from their political party in power. (Braimah et al., 2023: 19).

Table 4 below highlights specific services delivery failures across some of the seven cities and the main intervening political causes that have relevance for each system.

Table 4: City systems in IS: Types of system delivery failures and main political causes

System	Description of service delivery failure	Main political causes	Examples from cities
Education	B. Formal systems present but by voluntary sector (NGOs), therefore limited availability: Education is dominated by the private sector, challenging affordability.	A. Political neglect: elites and decisionmakers do not find the system failure politically significant or relevant in political terms and are thus not incentivised to take action. D. Political (in)capability for integrated services. Where political will to develop services exists among some actors, there is inability to mobilise sufficient resources for integrated services.	NGO-run schools strive to fill the gap in Mogadishu, offering more affordable education to urban low-income residents and IDPs, and incentives such as school feeding to encourage enrolment. In this case, school-feeding programmes are used as an incentive to also achieve the goal of providing education.
Energy	D. Formal systems present but risks associated with them, in part due to partial systems and in part due to poor quality services. Lack of access to formal electricity in many neighbourhoods. Fire outbreaks are frequent, often occasioned by pressure on power infrastructure.	B. Political self-interest: elites and decisionmakers are politically advantaged by system failure and, thus, not incentivised to take action. D. Political (in)capability for integrated services. Where political will to develop services exists among some actors, there is inability to mobilise sufficient resources for integrated services.	In Accra, informal settlement residents rely heavily on charcoal and wood for energy, though not always reliable. Illegal electric connections are common in Lilongwe's informal settlements, which lack formal connections to the grid, and this is a common point of conflict between residents and government agencies.
Food distribution	C. Formal systems present but inadequate quality in terms of day-to-day consumption or practice. Close linkage between the humanitarian and private sector operating in informal settlements. Large food aid contracts generate a lot of political interest among various actors: local authorities, businessmen and customary leaders.	D. Political (in)capability for integrated services. Where political will to develop services exists among some actors, there is inability to mobilise sufficient resources for integrated services.	Food assistance industry plays an important role with regard to informal settlements, especially IDP settlements. In Mogadishu, influx of IDPs and returnees has led to an expansion of the food market, due to increased demand. Large food aid contracts generate a lot of political interest among local authorities, entrepreneurs and clansmen. Businesspeople benefit from the business of providing food assistance to displaced populations. Their

			business interests are paramount and they may challenge any reforms that interfere with their businesses.
Road transport	A. Formal systems not present in informal areas. Dirt roads in poor conditions are the norm in informal settlements. Walking long distances to adjacent formal settlements to get to services is also common. This sometimes has safety implications.	B. Political self-interest: elites and decisionmakers are politically advantaged by system failure and, thus, not incentivised to take action. D. Political (in)capability for integrated services. Where political will to develop services exists among some actors, there is inability to mobilise sufficient resources for integrated services.	In Harare, women and girls walking from Churu Farm to Glenview reported being mugged. Communities are rarely involved in road upgrading. Construction of roads generates much anxiety in communities and is often used as a pretext for eviction of communities by political elites.
Sanitation and solid waste management	D. Formal systems present but risks associated with them, in part due to partial systems and in part due to poor quality services. Management of sanitation and waste is generally informal and unstructured. Proximity is a challenge for people with disabilities.	D. Political (in)capability for integrated services. Where political will to develop services exists among some actors, there is inability to mobilise sufficient resources for integrated services.	Powerful actors at the settlement and city levels in Kampala wield significant influence on sanitation provision and solid waste management. Caretakers and managers of community and public toilets/standpipes also play important roles. They are critical gatekeepers and determine the levels of access for various individuals.
Water	D. Formal systems present but risks associated with them, in part due to partial systems and in part due to poor quality services. Water sector is in many cases partially provided by the informal private sector, presenting contamination issues, and inequality in distribution.	D. Political (in)capability for integrated services. Where political will to develop services exists among some actors, there is inability to mobilise sufficient resources for integrated services.	In Mogadishu, there are stark differences in access to water between the central business district and the outskirts. IDP settlements are usually located beyond the main water pipeline grids, and therefore dependent on NGOs and small-scale vendors. In Dar es Salaam, lack of coordination between various government agencies affects water services provision.
Housing finance	A. Formal systems not present in informal areas. Increasing rental values make it difficult for tenants to afford rent. Many IS residents are excluded from accessing finance, due to lack of proper documentation.	B. Political self-interest: elites and decisionmakers are politically advantaged by system failure and, thus, not incentivised to take action. C. Political (in)capability for individual services. Where political will to develop services exists among some actors, there is inability to mobilise sufficient resources for integrated services.	In Freetown, there is currently no coherent policy on housing finance. There is also competition between the mayor and the central government with regard to housing policy. FCC faces major impediments from the central government in mobilising financial resources through property tax, which makes it fully reliant on the central government for funding.

Law and order	C. Formal systems present but inadequate quality in terms of day-to-day consumption or practice. There is a high tendency of formal justice systems towards corruption and ethnic or clan partisanship.	B. Political self-interest: elites and decisionmakers are politically advantaged by system failure and, thus, not incentivised to take action. C. Political (in)capability for individual services. Where political will to develop services exists among some actors, there is inability to mobilise sufficient resources for integrated services.	In Mogadishu, formal justice systems are underdeveloped, and customary law and order systems and Sharia are more trusted and accessible, though they can be discriminatory against marginalised or vulnerable members of the community, such as women, youth. Increased political competition in Accra has made informal settlements reservoirs for youths who can be mobilised by political actors to generate violence.
Healthcare	C. Formal systems present but inadequate quality in terms of day-to-day consumption or practice. Public healthcare is underfunded, offers poorer services but more accessible to large segments of the populations. Private healthcare has more resources and higher quality services, but most find it unaffordable.	C. Political (in)capability for individual services. D. Political (in)capability for integrated services. Where political will to develop services exists among some actors, there is inability to mobilise sufficient resources for integrated services.	In Mogadishu, IDPs receive healthcare through NGOs, but in general have poor access to it. There are security risks for both healthcare providers and patients, due to the regional context.

This table highlights how politics affects service delivery across the cities in this study. Issues of service provision, integration, access or affordability are a function of elites' volition and capability to improve services, linked to their political agendas. No strong correlation between type of service failure and main political cause is evident from this exercise. However, there seems to be a soft link between the complete absence of a formal service in informal settlements and the political advantage of its absence for city elites. Such is the case of access to finance, or to a proper transportation network that would connect IS residents with the formal city. A further relationship may be established between limited state capabilities and inadequate or partial provision of services. Such is the case for water, sanitation and health. Particularly notable across the board is a lack of, or extremely limited, access due to (in)affordability of both public and private fee-charging services.

4.4. Policy and planning

Informal settlement is understood to be the result of rapid urbanisation without commensurate development of residential sites with secure tenure options, basic services infrastructure and social amenities. Key actors in informal settlements, like residents, NGOs and informal service providers in the various cities, explained that these problems are ongoing. However, there is also evidence of selective upgrading activities (see Table 6) and more comprehensive programme and policy interventions (see Table 7). Various interventions for land tenure security have also been initiated with varying outcomes, which are summarised in Table 5.

4.4.1. *Improving tenure security*

Tenure insecurity is evident in many cities. In Accra, tenure insecurity manifests itself in sustained eviction threats and actual evictions. It results in socioeconomic disruptions, with women and children most affected. Similarly, in Mogadishu, the fact that most of the land within the city confines is privately owned means that the municipality has limited public land on which it can settle or relocate residents of informal settlements. As such, relocation, or housing of informal settlement residents, including IDPs, relies heavily on agreements that the municipality or other actors can make with private landowners and with clans. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of a codified system for adjudicating land and property (Bryld et al., 2020). In Freetown, insecurity of tenure is also very problematic. Land grabbing is among the main drivers of the creation and expansion of informal settlements in Freetown. Existing gaps in the legal framework prevent the adoption of mechanisms like titling or other forms of formal recognition that would give residents tenure security. The situation is similar in Kampala, where a government senior official mentioned that:

“... you will find that where there is informality, definitely there is insecurity of tenure ... the tenure, the holding is not clear ... and that is one of the reasons that brings about slums because you will not invest a lot when you know that the land is not yours. Government will not invest where there is an encumbrance in the land in terms of settlement.” (Kasaija et al., 2023).

Efforts to expand access to land and housing have prioritised tenure security for low-income groups (Pieterse, 2008); in informal settlements, it is associated with a significant decrease, if not elimination, of eviction threats. However, it is not clear that formal titles improve tenure security (Payne et al., 2009). Indeed, for tenants and the lowest-income landowners, titling may exacerbate insecurity. In Accra, challenges like high costs and complex administrative procedures that are associated with the acquisition of formal land title have resulted in low uptake of titling initiatives by the intended beneficiaries (ibid). Experience in Senegal also suggests that formalisation may result in sharp increases in rent, which may be beneficial for landlords but detrimental to tenants (ibid). Once the threat of evictions is removed, landlords may be inclined to increase the rent in the structures that they own. Improvement of services, which is often an outcome of formalisation, can also prompt landlords to charge higher rents for their structures. It is for this reason that Musembi contends that we must retort to proposals for formalisation with the question: “Security for whom?” (Musembi, 2007).

Related to this is the question of the most appropriate form of title that should be issued when regularisation occurs, complicated by the dearth of official data on informal settlements that could be used to create evidence-based policy. It has been increasingly acknowledged that tenure security, at least in the short term, can be achieved through a wide range of options, with provision of titles being just one of these. Attention has then been directed at devising pragmatic mechanisms to improve tenure security by building on local norms and practices. Incremental tenure interventions have emerged as a viable option and a departure from the blanket tenure

prescriptions, such as blanket issuance of titles, which often fail to recognise the unique peculiarities in various contexts. Incremental models proceed from the basis that tenure security can be realised at various points along a continuum. They could be employed with the goal of ultimately granting title but are sometimes structured to emphasise on extending tenure security through a range of mechanisms, without necessarily providing title as their ultimate goal (Smit and Abrahams, 2010; Durand-Lasserve and Royston, 2002). Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, in Dar es Salaam, Manara and Pani (2023) observe that “interim property titles” have been issued to protect people’s property rights, albeit with relatively limited success.

In all the seven cities, improvements to tenure security are under discussion. In Mogadishu, discussions around mechanisms for facilitating access to land and security of tenure exist for unregulated housing and IDPs separately, given the unique position of each group. Indeed, in all the cities, discussion has arisen around the best upgrading model for any given informal settlement (acknowledging the diversity of types and hence the potential need for site-specific solutions). This question featured prominently in Harare, where stakeholders recognise both the need for regularisation and a lack of commitment to inclusive slum upgrading by the Harare City Council. In Table 5, we explore some of the features in the tenure security continuum proposed by Durand-Lasserve and Royston (2002) and Smit and Abrahams (2010) to illustrate the kinds of interventions that have in the past been adopted across some of the seven cities, while highlighting the perceptions of security that these generate.

Table 5: Land tenure security interventions

Tenure security continuum		
Intervention	City and settlement	Outcomes
De facto recognition, but without legal recognition , with the primary goal being a guarantee against displacement (including recognition through provision of infrastructure).	Kampala – Katoogo informal settlements.	Mainly positive perception by the local leadership and the community because it allayed fears of eviction, which is a daily concern since residents were aware that their presence is considered illegal.
	Lilongwe – Mtandire informal settlements.	Improved tenure security. Improved provision of basic services, though still inadequate.
Provision of temporary occupancy permits.	No evidence from cities.	
Temporary non-transferable leases.	No evidence from cities.	

Long-term leases (individual and collective).	Harare – Dzivarasekwa Extension.	Ongoing process by the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works to issue individual leases to residents.
	Lilongwe – Masambabise and Area 49.	Improved tenure security and provision of basic services from the tenure regularisation initiative by LCC. Beneficiaries to acquire title from Ministry of Lands.
Legal recognition in development plans (for example, city master plans, local development plans, and so on).	Kampala – Kisenyi informal settlements.	Mainly positive perception but leadership and the community were constantly agitating for greater security, given the threat of evictions due to enormous development pressure as a result of the settlement's prime location in the city.
	Lilongwe – Area 49 federation community.	Secure tenure. Services such as water and electricity are provided to the community and roads are graded at intervals. LCC and community have recently started engaging on issuance of title deeds to individuals.
Provision of legal tenure through individual titling.	Kampala – Namuwongo Upgrading and Low-cost Housing Project.	Mixed outcomes because residents sold the land and transferred their rights to affluent and middle-income households; then moved over to a nearby wetland and created another informal settlement.
Provision of legal tenure through group titling.	Lilongwe – Ndunda land arrangement.	Pilot project in West Lilongwe targeting peri-urban land resulted in improved protections of family land from encroachment and facilitated orderly disposal of land.

The examples shown in Table 5 demonstrate an evolving understanding of the range of mechanisms for securing land tenure for marginalised urban residents. The central government, through relevant ministries, has taken the lead in these initiatives, though local authorities are also seen as critical actors and may initiate the processes. While individual titling remains a priority in many contexts, there seems to be an acknowledgement that it is not the panacea for solving land, housing and basic service needs. In Kampala and Harare, beneficiaries have sometimes transferred their rights to more affluent and middle-income households and moved to other informal settlements. There is a growing acknowledgement of the diversity of more accessible pathways through which tenure security for informal settlements residents can be realised. An important aspect of the mechanisms outlined in Table 5 is their emphasis on assurance of rights as the defining feature of tenure security. They are mainly concerned with safeguarding against unlawful expropriation and forced evictions. This perhaps

explains the ascendancy of legal recognition of informal settlements in development plans as an intervention for extending tenure security. In Lilongwe, this kind of intervention has facilitated the extension of water and other basic services in Area 49 informal settlements. However, the desire for individual titles is still prevalent among residents who are concerned with the development pressures, particularly in cases where their settlements are located in prime locations. As far as possible, experimentation and learning from the lessons which emerge from these interventions must drive the search for tenure options that can deliver land rights for marginalised groups in the city.

4.4.2. Upgrading informal settlements

Upgrading of at least some settlements has been adopted by city governments and other state agencies. Such upgrading generally includes some form of regularisation of land tenure and, with this, improved access to essential infrastructure and services. As noted in Section 2, in situ upgrading conforms to ideas of an inclusive city. As such, there is broad-based support for it from professionals, civil society organisations and official development assistance agencies. However, even when the idea is broadly accepted, there is considerable contestation around upgrading in specific sites. Common practical challenges raised include the feasibility of upgrading (site suitability and land ownership if the land is not public), the desirability of upgrading (land appropriateness, incremental improvements) and the scale of support from the residents. In some cases, where the land is particularly high value, politicians and others with a political interest may pressure (or force) some or all residents to move to alternative sites. In locations with high densities, it may not be possible to accommodate all residents without redevelopment and the construction of medium-rise blocks. As noted above, tenants may not be able to remain in upgraded areas if their needs are not considered, and if improved services lead to an increase in rents.

What is also illustrated by Table 5 is that upgrading is not a standardised process: there is considerable diversity in the scale and nature of improvements. While it might appear to offer opportunities for integrated development, the city studies suggest that this is rare. Upgrading initiatives increase the likelihood of universal recognition and reflect government awareness that informal settlements can no longer be ignored and/or eradicated. However, there is a mismatch between legal and policy positions around various factors affecting informal settlements, on the one hand, and the actual realities encountered within these settlements, on the other. In Accra, policies like the Ghana National Urban Policy and the Ghana National Spatial Development Framework have not been implemented. Here, past and ongoing interventions to provide for housing and other services by the government and donor agencies are not properly coordinated because of gaps in the existing policy and institutional frameworks. In Harare, policy initiatives have also been adopted but not implemented. In Freetown, there have been no up-to-date policies to guide urban planning and infrastructure development. Existing legislation is outdated, ineffectual and overly restrictive. In the

absence of proper legislative and policy frameworks, regeneration efforts in informal settlements such as Cockle Bay and Kolleh Town have relied on community efforts.

Table 6: Types of informal settlement upgrading, based on nature of improvement, approach and scale

Upgrading type	Scale	Nature of improvements	Approach	Examples from IS domain cities
Eviction-inducing	Scale may vary, but often deeply affects a determined population.	Rebuilding with place rather than people in mind. Residents do not benefit, due to increased costs associated with the upgrading (taxes, rent, and so on) and/or reduction of site density.	Often top-down, government-led. Limited consultation with residents, often neglecting significant groups' perspectives, such as renters.	In Harare, legally-backed evictions still happen, stressing the need for a clear policy and legislative framework that informs progressive state responses.
Rudimentary/ limited/ segmented	Localised scale.	Basic interventions, such as public toilets and community water kiosks requiring tokens, without a clear path to scale up or connect to a larger approach.	Approaches may vary and be led by government, INGOs or organised communities.	In Churu Farm (Harare) a politician funded the drilling and installation of the borehole that the community currently uses. In Mogadishu, with the support of donors such as the EU and the World Bank, the BRA and the FGS have embarked on pilot projects to provide housing to select residents of IS.
Incremental	Scale increments with time; initial investment ranging from modest developments to bulk service delivery.	Incremental provision of basic services and infrastructure, which acknowledges that local models of access to basic services already exist and can be strengthened.	Approach may vary, and be led by government, INGO or organised communities. Additional costs may result from partial development. Hard to account for interactions between systems (for example, water and drainage). Approach may be fragmentary and fail to acknowledge that services and infrastructure are multiscalar in the urban context (for example, getting wastewater to the boundary of the settlement without addressing the need to remove it).	In Dar es Salaam, there are two models of decentralisation wastewater treatment: in Vingunguti (tanks) and Chimazi (wetlands). Vingunguti also has the potential for some houses to connect to the utility's ponds. In Caledonia (Harare), the national government has led the installation of boreholes to improve water access and upgrading of the road network. In Hopley (Harare) VEI partnered with Harare City Council to provide water reticulation to 2,000 households, while UNICEF and Goal have been drilling boreholes in Mbare, Caledonia and Stoneridge.

Mid-range	Mid-scale.	Piped water and toilets in each home, electricity, some reblocking, paved access roads, sometimes sewers and drains.	Usually limited consultation with residents.	In Malawi, upgrading initiatives have been implemented in Mtsiriza, Chinsapo and Mtandire through a partnership between LCC, LWB, CCODE and the SDI Affiliate with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2012. The LWSP is currently installing water and sanitation facilities in eight informal settlements but the demand by far exceeds what it can meet. In Dar es Salaam, the Women Advancement Trust (WAT), promoted access to adequate and affordable shelter with secure tenure to low- and middle-income earners, particularly women. This was achieved through community mobilisation and sensitisation; awareness creation; empowering individuals, housing groups and cooperatives; and capacity building through the provision of technical support and advocacy. This has also added value to upgrading informal settlements, by promoting tenure security in terms of facilitating the issuance of land titles.
Comprehensive government-led	Large-scale (neighbourhood or city level).	Full range of infrastructure and services (drainage, street lighting, solid waste collection, and so on), support for house building and improvement and for enterprises. Usually including regularisation via legal land titles.	Top-down. Includes consultation with residents, but often leaves decisionmaking in the government's sphere.	Accra's Amui Dzor housing and in situ upgrading project in Ashaiman and the participatory slum upgrading projects in Janes Town and Usher Town.

Comprehensive community-led	Large-scale (neighbourhood or city level).	As above but with community control, as exemplified in upgrading programmes supported by SDI affiliates.	Bottom-up, with substantial community control over decisions.	In Dzivarasekwa Extension (Harare), a community-led slum upgrading project in 2014 included design studios encouraging community inputs to physical layout and architectural plans. Residents were able to resist upwards densification, even though this would have increased the number of plots and affordability, cultural preferences regarding owning a specific and defined land portion where households can grow vegetables, for example, were a top consideration.
	Large-scale (neighbourhood or at city level). Resilience-oriented.	Greater attention to assessing and anticipating future risk levels.	Bottom-up, with substantial community control over decisions.	In Freetown, development partners currently support participatory slum upgrading improvement in service infrastructure, supporting especially climate adaptation measures.

Recognition of the need for physical improvements may not be accompanied by collaborative planning that includes residents. In Lilongwe, local communities remain excluded whenever key decisions are made, as there are no clear channels for communication. This exclusion of residents, along with lack of coordination between other urban governance stakeholders, is highlighted as a cause of the many problems that are encountered in informal settlements; coordination initiatives in the water sector have not been replicated in other systems. In Harare, beneficiary communities are also excluded from upgrading processes. In Caledonia, an informal settlement in Harare, the government led the installation of boreholes to improve water access and upgrading of the road network. The viability and sustainability of this government-led upgrading has been criticised (Muchadenyika and Waiswa, 2018; McGregor and Chatiza, 2019). It has been argued that the government is not well positioned to engage in consultative processes with communities. Community-led upgrading approaches have thus been popularised by the SDI-affiliated alliance of Dialogue on Shelter Trust and the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation (see Box 1 above). Similarly, in Freetown, a network of NGOs is supporting the FCC to upgrade two informal settlements (Cockle Bay and Kolleh Town). The Federation of Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP), a community-based organisation affiliated with SDI, is promoting community-led in situ upgrading initiatives.

Table 7: Upgrading experiences and policy directions in the seven cities of ACRC IS domain

City	Policy directions (city and country)	Upgrading experiences
Accra	Existing policies include the Ghana National Urban Policy and the Ghana National Spatial Development Framework, the National Environment Policy, the National Climate Change Policy, the National Solid Waste Management Strategy and Action Plan, among others, with the objective to develop holistic and integrated planning. However, these policies do not target the specific challenges confronting informal settlement dwellers. Recently, the National Slum Upgrading and Prevention Strategy (2023-2030) was created, which seeks to improve living conditions of existing slums and prevent the emergence of new ones.	Participatory Slum Upgrading Project has been implemented in selected informal settlements like Bukom and James Town, initiated by the World Bank, to pave roads, provide markets, public toilets, shower houses and drainage systems for public waste disposal. The national government, through the Ghana Water Company and the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, are extending water pipelines to the entry point of low-income communities for onward connection by residents under the Low Income Communities Support Unit (LICSU) project. Another significant upgrading experience is the Amui Dzor housing project.
Dar es Salaam	<p>The National Human Settlements Development Policy promotes the development of sustainable human settlements, with a remit to make serviced land available for shelter and human settlements development to all sections of the communities through the improvement and provision of infrastructure and social services.</p> <p>The Urban Planning Act No.8 (2007) and the Land Use Planning Act No.6 (2007) mandate local authorities land use planning and implementation roles in their areas of jurisdiction. Municipalities work in close operation with ward and sub-ward (Mitaa) development committees.</p> <p>In the last decade, Tanzania launched two ambitious decentralisation programmes, the Local Government Reform Programme I and II. The first phase successfully led to devolution of responsibilities such as water, sanitation and roads, although local governments largely continued to rely on technical staff working with central ministries and fiscal transfers, rather than own-source revenue. As of 2016, the second phase had not been fully implemented and there seemed to be a trend back towards centralisation. This may reflect political rivalries between national and local governments creating disincentives for strengthening municipal capacities.</p>	<p>The government has undertaken a number of policies or programmes towards informal settlements, especially in Dar es Salaam. These include Slum clearance (1960s-1970s), Squatter Upgrading (1970- 1980), Sites and Services Project (1970s to 1990s), Community Infrastructure Upgrading Programme (CIUP) of the early 2000s, Property and Business Formalisation Programme also carried out from mid- 2000s and the ongoing initiative, Regularisation of Informal Settlements. Most of these initiatives were government-led, with minimum or little community engagement and participation.</p> <p>In addition, a number of NGOs and financial institutions have initiated programmes that address land and affordable housing in urban areas. Examples of these are those supported by WAT-HST; Mwenge Housing Cooperatives and CCI and the Tanzania Federation for the Chamazi housing project approach. However, most of these community-based housing initiatives have not been taken up by the government, and have remained small pilot projects funded by donors without replication, hence their sustainability and scalability is being questioned.</p>
Freetown	Even though the Freetown Structure Plan 2014 Housing Policy states that long-term strategic upgrading “must involve the Freetown population at all levels and aim at the active	Most upgrading is largely promoted by development agencies. The recent World Bank funded “Urban Resilient Sierra Leone Project” is supporting comprehensive upgrading and flood

	<p>participation and coordination in the implementation phases", specific legal and policy frameworks are still missing, both at the local and national scale. There are no upgrading protocols. Information on securing land titles for upgrading is not readily available, there are inadequate resources at the city level, and there is a lack of coordination between agencies and actors. However, new governance structures that build on collaborative planning with residents have been established, in an effort to address inequalities embedded in the planning system. One such structure is the Freetown City Learning Platform, a space to discuss current urban issues, and collaborate to identify solutions, coordinate and develop proposals for the upgrading of informal settlements in the city. Moreover, the Freetown Mayor's "Transform Freetown" agenda aspires to build over 5,000 low-cost building units. The critical challenge is access to well-located land for upgrading, and funding for land acquisition.</p>	<p>risk mitigation in Coconut Farm, Moyiba and Portee-Rokupa informal settlements. Specifically upgrading drains, access roads, walkways, footbridges, water supply and sanitation, public spaces, local markets and LED street lighting. In the past, FEDURP has undertaken small-scale precedent-setting upgrading projects centred on accessibility, toilet facilities, waste management, retaining walls and drainages, restoring mangroves and tree planting. Through their effort, they have been mobilising and building the capacities of the community to engage, collect data and build knowledge, leveraging financial resources from community members and working collaboratively with development partners and FCC in slum improvement efforts.</p>
Harare	<p>Relevant legislation that speaks about upgrading include the National Human Settlements Policy (2019), the National Climate Change Policy (2017), the Climate Change Response Strategy (2014), and the National Adaptation Plan of Zimbabwe. Harare City Council has a Regularisation Policy ready to be implemented, as well as a Slum Upgrading Protocol, created in partnership with Dialogue on Shelter for the Homeless Trust and the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation. However, a concern remains over the lack of operationalisation of such progressive policy proposals.</p>	<p>Civil-society-driven upgrading interventions are slowly gaining traction. Community-led slum upgrading project in Dzivarasekwa Extension (Harare) is a clear example. While localised improvements in infrastructure services and living standards are visible, the approach is yet to address issues at scale, and the lessons from these co-production arrangements are not being effectively shared. There is concern over the continuation of pilot projects that fail to scale up and to transform policy infrastructure in cities. The SDI Affiliate partnered with Harare City Council and the national government through the Ministry of Local Government to undertake a series of upgrading projects, in an effort to replicate the success of Dzivarasekwa Extension, with some upgrading projects underway, such as Tafara Mabvuku.</p>
Kampala	<p>The city-level government is empowered by the KCCA Act (2010), the Constitution of Uganda (1997) and the Local Government Act (Cap 243) to mobilise, budget for and allocate resources to deliver a range of social services. In a sharp departure from the decentralisation policy, the procurement, approval and contracting of large-scale socioeconomic projects, including slum upgrading, have been recentralised at the city level under the current governance model. Upgrading and urban social housing provision have persistently been relegated to the periphery of the NRM's development agenda.</p>	<p>The MoLHUD has played an important role in formulating and implementing upgrading initiatives to improve IS. For example, it implemented the site and service upgrading schemes for the former IS of Namuwongo, Olli, Malukhu and Masese in Kampala, Arua, Mbale and Jinja, respectively, during the 1980s. Later, in 2003, at the request of the then MoWHC's Minister of State for Housing and Kampala Central Division MP, SDI partnered with the government of Uganda, KCC and Jinja Municipal Council on slum upgrading, and provided support for training, profiling and enumeration, also setting up the Ugandan affiliate, NSDFU and its support NGO, ACTogether. From the ensuing mobilisation in Kisenyi, a pilot water and</p>

	<p>Over the last 20 years, despite the existence of the Slum Upgrading Strategy (2008) holistic slum upgrading with tangible outputs/outcomes appears to have failed to materialise.</p>	<p>sanitation block was built by residents to meet needs, whilst also reducing sanitation-related disease outbreaks. Although they recorded mixed outcomes, these projects demonstrate MoLHUD's role as change agents in various attempts by the central government to transform the city's IS.</p> <p>However, in the past 20 years, the emergence of an unregulated informal land market, commodification of land, coupled with business elites allied to the NRM government seeking to protect their investments and expand possibilities to draw rents from prime public land, especially in the city centre, have converged to make it difficult to achieve holistic slum upgrading. Only piecemeal slum improvements have been undertaken in partnerships between the city government and non-state actors (mainly access to clean water and sanitation).</p>
Lilongwe	<p>The Lilongwe City Council (LCC) has commenced the process of mass land regularisation to address tenure insecurity. Additionally, the national slum upgrading process aims to enhance security of tenure. The national government of Malawi is set to improve living conditions by upgrading and regularising existing informal settlements through policy development, sites and services projects, and issuing of land titles (GoM, 2019). A similar line is followed by LCC. These directions are in line with the new Customary Land Act (2016) and aim to ensure security of tenure, which will increase the value for individual property. Security of tenure is an integral part of the right to adequate housing and a necessary ingredient for the enjoyment of many other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. The approach being used by the council has reduced tenure security to land titles, but the concept of legitimate tenure rights extends beyond mainstream notions of private ownership (individual titles) and includes multiple tenure forms deriving from a variety of tenure systems (United Nations Human Rights Office, 2013).</p>	<p>The Ministry of Lands is piloting IS upgrading, including the provision of better housing and improved access to social services. It has already identified a site to construct 500 housing units. LCC is undertaking another regularisation initiative, moving away from past approaches of regularisation (land demarcation surveys and providing documentation), towards conducting cadastral surveys, and providing land title deeds.</p> <p>The city is also implementing the World Bank-funded Lilongwe Water and Sanitation Project (LWSP), which intends to address water, sanitation and hygiene challenges by 2035. The project aims to facilitate construction of 8,000 improved toilet facilities in Chinsapo 1 and 2, Mgona, Mtandire, Mtsiriza and Kauma. It will also rehabilitate and expand the sewerage network by upgrading existing connections and installing new ones, with around 5,000 households expected to be added.</p> <p>The remaining challenge is to finance the scaling up.</p>
Mogadishu	<p>Over the last few years, the idea of integrating IDPs and IS into the urban development of the city has slowly been gaining traction. According to a former mayor of Mogadishu, the presence of IS and IDPs is unappealing and not commensurate with the sought- after image of Mogadishu. This idea was partly behind the efforts made by the FGS in 2013/14 to push IDPs into the periphery. Since then, policy shifts and increased engagement with the international community have contributed to a gradual modification. For example, the</p>	<p>There are ongoing pilot projects to provide housing to select residents of IS. The first aimed at 300 houses with funding from the EU. It remains to be seen whether these pilots will catalyse actions towards greater investment. Another significant ongoing activity is the World Bank Project – The Somali Urban Resilience Project (SURP) – that includes infrastructure development in Mogadishu and other cities with large influxes of returnees and IDPs. Upgrading in situ would be a complex endeavour in Mogadishu, since municipal land ownership or</p>

	<p>development and implementation of an agreed set of Eviction Guidelines have managed to marginally lower the number of unlawful and forced evictions of residents from IS, both within the city and of IDPs in the periphery of the city.</p> <p>Another development has been the initiation of efforts towards providing housing to residents of IS. This has been recognised in the National Development Plan as being a constituent part of urban development of Mogadishu, along with service provision and access to livelihoods.</p>	<p>control is limited. Most land in the city is in the hands of private landowners, and informal settlements are only allowed temporary residence. Upgrading in situ would require at least: ascertaining the number of IDPs, as these are always in flux; acquiring land from the landowners and the municipality or its partners developing it; and, for this to be sustainable, first settling the question around the status of long-term IDPs residing in Mogadishu. This in turn is intrinsically linked to a higher order issue of the Somali Constitution and how/if the question of IDPs will be addressed in the final document.</p>
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The examples in Table 7 above demonstrate that there are considerable efforts to provide housing for tenants, who are the majority group occupying informal settlements. Initiatives by citizen groups and civil society actors to co-produce housing have gained traction, with projects being implemented on a pilot basis in Harare. However, the question of scaling up remains, as most of the civil society and community-led interventions encounter funding challenges. Examples from Freetown have shown the potentials that exist when partners work together and leverage on the financial capabilities of beneficiary communities. However, while some of these housing interventions are aimed at low-income residents, the prevailing market forces drive beneficiaries to sell their houses, which means that it is mostly middle-income individuals that benefit. Safeguarding against this may require that restrictions on transfer are put in place while addressing the factors that drive residents to sell. Unlocking land for housing and making land markets more efficient are also critical for the success the upgrading initiatives that have been outlined above. Other factors, like high property rates and high utility charges that may come with tenure security and regularisation, can also create precarity and must be addressed.

5. Implications

The analysis of informal settlements in the seven cities highlights three key themes that need to be acknowledged for effective policy and programming interventions. First, policy and programming have a significant impact in informal settlements. Second, informal settlements play a role in rent-seeking and electoral success. Third, elites matter to informal settlement residents, who devise complex strategies to navigate access to basic services and tenure security. These themes are explored in more detail below.

5.1. Shifting policy landscapes

Numerous policymakers, academics, professionals, entrepreneurs and international funders view informal settlements as a key frontier for practical and conceptual intervention (Cirolia, 2017). Their understanding(s) of informal settlements have informed how they frame challenges and pathways for change – often without consulting settlement residents. However, our analysis suggests that there has been a

shift in how problems in informal settlements are understood and interventions formulated, with residents being viewed as critical actors whose views must feed into policy to ensure their responsiveness. In part, this openness to consultation results from residents' own individual and collective action. Residents have developed data capabilities which they strategically deploy to engage with policymakers. The growing openness also reflects the changing nature of vulnerabilities in the city, coupled with growing levels of inequality. This has resulted in policymakers recognising the need to ground policy prescriptions and interventions on the lived realities of inhabitants, to build resilience among them, and to ensure that any proposed interventions are scalable. Residents of informal settlements in various cities have gained practical experience from different interventions implemented in their communities. Drawing from this experience, they can identify policy gaps and advocate for targeted policy, legislative and regulatory interventions that are scalable at both the city and national levels. It explains why informal settlements have become important loci for these kinds of interventions.

Various factors can be said to have influenced the policy shifts that informal settlements have recently witnessed. In Harare, inadequate provision of housing and the growing scale of informality has compelled the city council to adopt a regularisation policy which seeks to move from previous default responses of demolitions and evictions to more inclusive upgrading practices. Residents' demands for more inclusive policies, backed with concrete data, have influenced approaches in cities like Nairobi, where informal settlements like Mukuru have been declared "special planning areas" (SPAs), triggering participatory planning initiatives. Increased engagements between local authorities and international donor agencies are another factor that is driving the policy shifts. In Somalia, these engagements have contributed to a gradual modification of practices, namely a reduction in forced evictions of informal settlement residents in Mogadishu. Increased efforts in Mogadishu to provide housing for informal settlement residents have led to projects being initiated in Heliwaa, Abdizaziz and five other districts, with support from the EU and the World Bank. However, until now, these projects appear to have stalled. Some international organisations, such as the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), UN-Habitat and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), are in the process of piloting rental subsidy housing arrangements as a way of easing the housing challenges for Mogadishu's displacement-affected populations and low-income groups.

Collaborations between residents, local NGOs and state agencies are also influencing policy reforms. In Dar es Salaam, CCI has collaborated with DAWASA to develop sanitation interventions for low-income residents, like the simplified sewerage system. In Lilongwe, strategies have been adopted to mitigate climate change-induced vulnerabilities in informal settlements. LCC, together with the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA), has established and trained ward-level civil protection committees to be contact points for disaster risk management programmes. Also notable at the time of Covid-19 was the introduction of social protection for low-income urban households by the government of Malawi. This was the first time that the

government initiated cash transfers to mitigate the adverse effects of a pandemic. Over 199,000 households were enrolled on this programme, receiving the equivalent of the national minimum wage. However, at the same time, low-income neighbourhoods were on the receiving end of state-orchestrated violence, ostensibly to control the spread of the virus. Informal settlements were increasingly stigmatised as high-density, high-risk areas.

Even in the absence of policies that specifically focus on informal settlements, there exist a host of other frameworks at the national and city levels that support upgrading. The range of upgrading interventions outlined in this paper exist because of the increased awareness of the challenges of informal settlements and the state's obligations to address them. UN member states have also committed to the realisation of SDGs, which includes a commitment to upgrading slums and informal settlements. The levels of investment that upgrading initiatives require inevitably demands the presence of the state and other actors, such as donor agencies. Municipal authorities like LCC and FCC are involved in World Bank-funded upgrading processes. There is an explicit recognition of informal settlements in Malawi's National Urban Policy, with the policy calling for provision of affordable serviced land to facilitate access to housing and service provision in informal settlements. Sierra Leone's National Land Policy provides a framework for recognition of informal settlements, with the goal of expanding access to land for occupation by the residents of these settlements.

Of concern, however, is that many of these progressive policy proposals are not operationalised/implemented. The success rates of policy interventions also vary depending on the context. There is also a question about the extent to which these interventions translate to broader systemic changes within the city and beyond. This requires building better interfaces with policymakers. It is crucial to prioritise scholarly attention towards addressing these questions. In Zimbabwe, despite commitments by the government to integrate climate adaptation into human development programmes – in line with its National Climate Change Policy of 2017 – much is yet to be done to reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience of informal settlements. Inadequate attention has been paid to the question of affordability. In Accra, market-led strategies have been found to be problematic when it comes to provision of housing, as interest rates for mortgages are too high for most informal settlement inhabitants. Other models have been proposed, such as financing of housing using SDI's Urban Poor Fund (Bolnick, 2018). This has resulted in some relative levels of success in projects like the Amui Dzor Housing Project. There is, however, a question of whether this is achievable at scale, and how to do this through collaborations with local authorities, given that the state has the primary duty to provide housing. Affordability questions also emerge with regards to interventions like decentralised wastewater treatment (DEWAT) in Dar es Salaam's informal settlements, and the sociotechnological sanitation options being promoted in Kampala's informal settlements. The costs associated with these sanitation solutions, coupled with insufficient space, may sometimes be inhibitory; hence the need to adapt interventions to local economic contexts (Wang et al., 2013; Banana et al., 2015; Cirolia et al., 2021).

Government agencies are also not adequately equipped to develop the requisite technical capacities to institutionalise new approaches to provision of land tenure. Only in a few contexts have interventions been attempted to expand access to secure tenure. In Namibia, the Flexible Land Tenure System (FLTS) is worth mentioning as a notable alternative form of tenure that was developed as a parallel, interchangeable system to the freehold tenure system that was already in place (Republic of Namibia, 2016). The FLTS creates the starter title (a basic form of tenure, which grants rights to a dwelling but not full rights over the land) and the land hold title (more advanced and gives title holder more expansive rights) as alternative forms of land titles that are simpler and cheaper to administer and which are targeted to benefit informal settlement residents. FLTS's recognition of group ownership is a unique feature that further augments its tenure security objectives. For a starter title scheme to be upgraded to a land hold title scheme, consent must be obtained from at least 75% of holders of rights in a starter scheme, which is a critical safeguard that protects land in these schemes from market forces. The need for proper safeguards against commodification of land in informal settlements is particularly visible in Harare, where a significant number of original beneficiaries of affordable land in Dzivarasekwa Extension ended up selling their land to outsiders. In Botswana, to deal with the problem of the sale of allocated land by low-income beneficiaries, the government issued Certificate of Rights (CORs), which grants individuals the right to use the land, with the ultimate ownership resting with the state (Yahya, 2002). Beneficiaries must have lived in the locality for at least six months and must be willing to comply with the minimum development standards. The costs associated with conversion of CORs to other tenure types are prohibitive and this explains the high retention rates of CORs (Nkwae and Dumba, 2010).

But improving tenure security through incremental intervention demands that systemic issues in land delivery institutions are addressed. This includes facilitating increased transparency in land information systems to ensure that the various interests in land in informal settlements are clearly mapped and that competing interests are resolved. Making land markets in informal settlements work better for the most vulnerable residents also requires that frameworks are established to recognise the full range of interests in informal settlements, including those which have not fully developed into legally recognised rights. In Kampala, city researchers observe that effective upgrading can be realised where measures are put in place to regulate informal land markets and make them less speculative. This should be done within a collaborative framework with local communities and by building strategic coalitions that can explore appropriate interventions to make informal land markets more responsive to needs in informal settlements.

5.2. Significance of informal settlements for city elites

Power resides in formal and informal actors who have varying levels of influence in decisionmaking at the settlement, city and national levels. Formal actors include elected representatives (MPs, mayors and councillors) civil society, NGOs and other development actors, while semi-formal ones include customary/tribal chiefs, community

chairman/ladies, youth and women leaders and other interest groups. The exercise of power is very visible, given the varying degrees of authority that the identified actors bear (although the exercise of some power is hidden and less visible). In some cases, this performance of authority takes the form of competing groups fighting over a single cause when the outcome is significant to them. There are also cases where competition for power takes the form of polarising action enacted by the different parties involved – that is, actors are seeking to exert dominance over each other and the cause matters less. Power in informal settlements is also dependent on the levels of influence that these actors are able to exert around issues of resource mobilisation and distribution, dispute resolution, mobilisation of internal community and external actors, and service delivery, among other things. The exercise of power also happens at different scales, with the neighbourhood, settlement and city being the important loci for action. Findings show that outcomes within informal settlements are highly influenced by power dynamics at the city and national levels, and even beyond.

Informal settlements are relevant to the politics and political economy of cities in multiple ways. Firstly, as described in this study, a preponderance of clientelist deals to secure access to services and infrastructure is common. Upgrading of informal settlements – even if it includes the very minimal provision of services, such as a water point – may be used to secure loyalty from upgraded neighbourhoods through efforts to manipulate populations – for example, to favour those that share the ethnic composition of the politician. Service provision is also an avenue through which politicians coerce and intimidate populations, particularly in the periods surrounding elections (Muchadenyika and Waiswa, 2018). With growing populations in many African cities, informal settlements have become important in influencing election outcomes. For example, political elites in Freetown mostly engage inhabitants of these settlements around election times or when there are emergencies. It was observed by a respondent in Freetown that:

“Generally, we all know that these places become very important for politicians during elections. Politicians believe that once you have the financial wherewithal you can storm those places to secure votes. And so, for as long as you have money, what it takes to convince them, especially in terms of inducement, they are a ready spot for votes.”⁷

Political elites may gain legitimacy in the eyes of their constituents by exercising authority within informal settlements, especially those where several elites have overlapping mandates and competition for the support of inhabitants ensues. This is seen, for instance, where both customary leaders and elected officials exercise concurrent authority (Kanyane, 2017). The absence of formal state agencies from these spaces contributes to the authority of customary leaders and weakens that of elected authorities (Marrengane et al., 2021). Similar competition exists where several elected individuals exercise authority concurrently. For example, in Lilongwe, there is a historical conflict between councillors and members of parliament (MPs), which

⁷ Koroma and Refell (2023).

emanates from the ambiguity of their roles and contention around control of constituency development funds. MPs' role under the constitution is restricted to legislation, and not control over development projects, which is assigned to councillors; yet MPs often propose projects to the CEO of LCC to be funded by the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). MPs consider councillors to be their competitors, and therefore limit the opportunities that the latter have to deliver development projects. Competition between councillors and MPs to deliver development projects is associated with their attempts to influence local politics and capture votes. This form of competition has also been observed in Freetown, where councillors partner with NGOs working in informal settlements to deliver basic services. This gives councillors more legitimacy than MPs and enables them to build political capital through various initiatives that they undertake in the settlements.

In Harare, settlements like Crowborough, where the local councillor belongs to the opposition CCC, can have their issues raised in the opposition-dominated Harare City Council with little contestation. However, settlements that are opposition-controlled but sit on land controlled by the ruling ZANU-PF tend to be more hotly debated in the council. The gatekeeping roles that ZANU-PF ruling elites maintain in Harare's informal settlements have given them leverage to control what kinds of interventions are implemented, and by which actors. Civil society activities and interventions that are perceived as a security threat to the state are highly regulated and countered through arduous vetting and clearance processes, to ensure they align with ZANU-PF's agenda. This exercise of authority is also a regime legitimisation tool – one of the “strategies of subversion” (Resnick, 2014) that feature a lot in vertically divided contexts in which opposition parties control local authorities, where the ruling party may try to prevent the successes of the local authority. This has significant implications for how local authorities like the Harare City Council can deliver basic services.

Issues related to legitimacy are complex, however, because electoral success depends on votes from inside and outside informal settlements. Politicians try to appease various pressure groups without eroding their chances of getting elected and staying in power. In Lilongwe, MPs and councillors are aware that their stay in power is tied to their ability to maintain their personal networks, alliances and support base. They therefore provide handouts to residents and ensure that their supporters are in control of public amenities at the community level. Local politicians in Kampala refrain from evicting informal settlement residents of Katoogo, who have moved into the city's fragile wetlands, due to the fear of losing votes. There is also an acknowledgement that local authorities and formal service providers can potentially increase their revenue streams by expanding their networks in informal settlements (Horn et al., 2020). Upgrading as an intervention then comes with the expectation that residents will pay for connected services and contribute to the revenues of local authorities. This is attractive to politicians wanting to demonstrate their ability to raise and use funds for improved service delivery across the city. In Freetown, the payment of property tax by low-

income residents has contributed to FCC's revenue base, which it then uses to provide basic services across the city.

Politicians and other elites may also earn rents from service provision, both formal and informal, in unimproved neighbourhoods, infrastructure installation or plot sales in settlements that are being upgraded, housing provision and land speculation.

Examples include shack rental (Accra, Freetown, Lilongwe) and gaining contracts to improve infrastructure (Accra). Bonnet et al. (2020) describe a context in Mogadishu, where powerful elites appropriate humanitarian aid by creating refugee settlements to catalyse local economic development, and then forcing the refugees to relocate to alternative neighbourhoods. "All the informal settlement residents are required to give up to the gatekeeper [IDP camp manager] a certain amount of the aid they receive from aid agencies. On occasion, this can go up to 50% of the aid they receive, whether in cash or in kind" (Kamau et al., 2023: 8). The camp managers are controlled by clan leaders (some of whom are local government officials and businesspeople) as well as others with traditional clan authority. This extraction of resources is enabled by development agencies with headquarters in Nairobi.

If elites have multiple interests in informal settlements, then the residents of informal settlements have interests in courting, lobbying and/or manipulating elites. The following sub-section explains some of the collective actions of residents to acquire resources and services from elites.

5.3. Modalities of collective action

Our city studies find that residents' collective action strategies have grown in scale and sophistication over the past two decades. This positive transformation is due mainly to the experience and legitimacy of informal settlement residents. During this research process, there have been some opportunities for informal settlement community members to engage with city authorities and have their input properly considered. They were asked to have their materials, maps and layout plans ready, as evidence to present internally and to support compliance processes. Some city teams, such as Harare, found that by consistently engaging with authorities, residents achieved better results over time. Community members also learnt from experiences in other places (horizontal knowledge exchange).

The expansion of democratic spaces in various contexts, propelled by shifts towards decentralisation of power and authority, has enabled citizens to engage more with leaders and other elites and demand certain standards of living (Stren, 2012). Moreover, as evidenced by policy initiatives, political elites are aware that they need to demonstrate their capability to address informal settlement issues, and this further legitimates residents' claims for political inclusion. Key strategies employed by communities to gain inclusion in local governance processes include the use of data/evidence to support their arguments for policy change (Patel and Mitlin, 2002), and community savings groups for mutual support and which they use to demonstrate their capacity to improve their neighbourhoods (Bolnick, 2016).

Residents increasingly strategise around two aspects of their condition: the first is their partial invisibility and partial formal recognition; the second is their being subject to different types and levels of authority (national, local, settlement level; formal and informal; customary and technocratic). Regarding the first condition, there is a shared understanding that most of the problems encountered in informal settlements are the result of official actors not recognising the rights and claims of residents. At the same time, residents seek to maintain a certain degree of invisibility, especially at initial or vulnerable points in the lives of their settlements (Heeks and Shekhar, 2019). Regarding the second condition, while political actors relevant to the informal settlements in all the cities we studied belong to complex networks of formal and informal power, we find that customary/cultural/ethnic power still holds particular currency within neighbourhoods. This is especially reflected in Accra and Mogadishu, as captured by the quotes below.

“Traditional [customary] authority, ethnic and religious leaders also play important roles in informal settlements. Politics and partisan politics has eroded the executive and legislative role of traditional leaders. However, they remain relevant because they embody the values and traditional identities of people of their ethnicity. The prominent role of traditional authority is more pronounced in indigenous settlements. At the city level they are very influential in the selection and appointment of city mayors and this influence extends far into major decisiontaking in the city.”⁸

“For those settlements in the city that are located in government buildings, the ability of their residents to continue residing there depends on issues around clan dynamics and what their eviction portends with regard to inciting clan-related conflict.”⁹

The complexities of power and governance (see above) mean the ability of local authorities to steer reform at the neighbourhood scale is limited. In the case of Freetown, the political leadership in informal settlements is complex and fluid because of the multi-layered leadership structures. And in Harare, some government officials have a dismissive attitude to claims by informal settlements’ political groups, particularly for settlements located in opposition strongholds. Notwithstanding this, people living in *magada* (an informal settlement in the Epworth neighbourhood) are increasingly taking the initiative to approach the city council for collaboration, without waiting for the council to act first.

Residents display creativity in negotiating with elites. They adopt multifaceted identities and roles according to the situation, including selective – at times performative – affiliation with political parties and organisations. Even where their relationship to elites is “clientelist”, residents often manage to advance their own agendas – extracting material benefits and gaining formal recognition. In Freetown, as seen above, informal settlement representatives are not politically affiliated, but they are aware that political elites engage residents mainly to win votes, or to show responsiveness to emergency events. These representatives then organise through committees to channel the

⁸ Kamau et al. (2023).

⁹ Ibid.

development needs of the community. Klaus et al. (2023) have also observed this in their work in urban Ghana, rural Senegal and coastal Kenya, where they cite recognition and the protections that come with it as the overarching imperative which guides clientelist acts in deprived contexts.

5.3.1. Increased multilevel organising and alliances

Among the strategies for engaging with city elites and other relevant actors in informal settlements. Residents have developed large, multilayered structures for organising, sensitising and mobilising. One of the largest structures is SDI (see Box 2 above). In the past two decades, SDI has formed a network of affiliates, consisting of residents' federations along with their supporting NGOs. The network has multilayered geographical presence at settlement, city and country levels, as well as international regional hubs, a secretariat, and links with countless other international networks. In the early 21st century, there was no similar international slum dwellers' organisation operating in African cities. The network's emergence through multiple levels of solidarity organising has increasingly challenged the perception that informal settlement residents are unable to produce knowledge, organise or lead, and that their settlements constitute a problem that "professionals" must solve.

Ever since their first mobilising steps in the 1990s, channels like saving groups have been used by the communities to mobilise resources for upgrading and provision of services in their settlements. In Accra, for example, settlement enumeration and mapping provide an entry point for the development of relationships with city authorities. SDI-linked saving groups are associated with various settlement-level interventions that have been scaled out across cities like Harare and Nairobi. Residents in Freetown's informal settlements have organised themselves into community groups and community-based organisations (CBOs), which they use to advocate for intervention around various issues. Additionally, community chairs are elected across Freetown and tasked with coordinating development efforts in informal settlements. These representatives are not affiliated to political parties. They have set up various committees through which the development needs of the community are channelled for collective action.

Interest groups also form around various issues. These initiatives represent community assertions of agency – a desire to become important actors in informal settlements. The FCC has collaborated with such interest groups to reduce exposure to disasters, hazards and vulnerability in coastal and hillside informal settlements. Communities also demonstrate their resourcefulness to government agencies through their partnerships or affiliations with networks and development agencies like SDI, UNDP, UN-Habitat, Cities Alliance, FCDO, among others.

Notable in the cities are platforms that facilitate the creation of issue-based coalitions. For example, in Kampala, the SDI-affiliated federation has created "city forums" (building on the tradition of municipal development forums) to "counter" nodes of power and pressure for reform (Nyamweru and Dobson, 2014; King and Kasaija, 2018). Each

informal settlement provides a member to join the city forum, which sits monthly with various officials of Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), and sometimes ministerial officials, to address priority issues in the city's 72 informal settlements. While these forums may not be considered "formal", in the sense of being written into existing legislation, they have become institutionalised, not only in Kampala but also in other cities in Uganda.¹⁰ These forums are important as utilitarian spaces where groups usually considered "powerless" exercise considerable agency. As noted above, there is also a city forum in Harare. The Urban Action Lab at Makerere University in Kampala and the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre have played similar roles to these forums, using evidence-based policy advocacy to lobby local and central government.

However, as has been noted, there is a limit to what residents can achieve on their own. The scale of resources required for initiatives like settlement upgrading means that at least some level of state investment is required. Additionally, patterns of exclusion are frequently reproduced in these spaces that residents convene.

5.3.2. *Navigating formal authority*

As noted above, IS residents develop and utilise multifaceted, flexible identities and roles in negotiating with elites. They can strategically "enact the norms of communication and deliberation" (Klaus et al., 2023) to sustain patron–client relations, which gives them access to material benefits and aids in their recognition project. Their core strategies for engagement of relevant powerholders – contention, collaboration or subversion – are not separate but simultaneous and iterative approaches (Mitlin, 2018; Mitlin, 2023).

"...[G]rassroots structures have mastered the art of navigating formal authorities in their struggles for land tenure security. In addition, this displays an understanding of the extent and limits of their power in certain geographies and hierarchies."¹¹

In Harare, although settlement elites – referred to as "gatekeepers" – have no formalised power, they have significant influence on how plots are allocated, and this power stems from their political party affiliation. Even though they collude across political parties to gain access to land and support each other's self-interest, they still contest policies and programmes and demonstrate party political contestation in public discourse.

IS residents often have to deal with dismissive attitudes from government officials. For example, in Zimbabwe, the unpredictable nature of the political landscape makes it risky for officials to align with, or entertain demands from, groups that are manifestly associated with certain political individuals. Residents from Dzivarasekwa Extension stated that when approaching government offices for slum upgrading or regularisation issues, they had become aware of the need to make their politics less visible. Nonetheless, when political openings present themselves, residents are often quick to

¹⁰ See Bogere (2021) for a discussion of the significance of such forums in Uganda.

¹¹ Nyamangara et al. (2023: 12).

make use of them. In Nairobi, during the 2022 general elections campaign period, residents of Mukuru informal settlements collectively drafted a manifesto spelling out what they viewed as the pressing problems in the settlements, and their solutions. They convened deliberative spaces where they invited the various candidates for elective offices to partake and sign the manifesto, to indicate their commitment to addressing the issues outlined upon their election into office. This enabled residents to engage with the various political candidates in a structured manner. Apart from the expected material benefits, they hoped to tactfully acquire recognition.

From the illustrations above, it is clear that the scale and nature of disadvantages within informal settlements requires residents to be creative – and performative – when engaging with the multiple relevant authorities either individually or collectively. Even when they engage with formal actors, residents balance this positioning with contention politics and subversive actions (Mitlin, 2018). How residents balance this need for maintaining autonomy while engaging with formal actors in traditionally exclusionary spaces will importantly shape their ability to access opportunities and influence outcomes in their settlements.

6. Conclusions

This paper offers critical insights into the changing policy context of informal settlements across the seven cities. The policy interventions that have been mapped here indicate that informal settlements are a well-established domain that can no longer be ignored. At the global level, the UN SDGs have redirected focus onto cities, and member states have committed to upgrading and providing basic services to slums and informal settlements. The policy context at the national level is also changing, due to a range of factors, including the emergence of organised citizen groups and reform coalitions that engage with policymakers to drive change. This study has shown commonalities across the seven cities, but has cautioned against problematic generalisations. It has also shown the multiplicity of actors at the national, city and local levels that have explicit, often competing, authority to address the needs of informal settlement residents. Competition for influence and resources is rife, particularly in settlements where customary authorities exercise considerable influence and in settlements and cities that are opposition-controlled. Customary authorities continue to exercise authority in the absence of formal state actors when it comes to provision of land and basic services.

The study has also identified the city systems that are integral to the functioning of informal settlements. It has highlighted the lack of integrated services, largely due to limited resources and inadequate capacity of local authorities. This leaves room for informal providers to supply services, but these are largely unaffordable and of poor quality. This situation, together with other system shortfalls, continues to expose residents – particularly the least resourced – to vulnerabilities that are further exacerbated by changing climate. Paradoxically, these failures also provide an opportunity where the political settlement aligns to do “upgrading right”. In Freetown,

residents' ability to collaborate with elected representatives and development partners has expanded the space for participatory informal settlements upgrading with also the aim of implementing climate adaptation measures. Upgrading has also gained prominence in other cities as resettlement policies have become unpopular. These processes are often catalysed by organised residents, who are frustrated by the lack of provision.

Reform coalitions that bring together citizen groups and other non-governmental stakeholders have also emerged as key drivers of informal settlements upgrading. There are also considerable efforts by citizen groups and civil society actors to co-produce housing, with projects being implemented on a pilot basis, as is happening in Harare. These resident-led initiatives are indicative of the increasingly sophisticated organisational capabilities and desires for elite engagement of informal settlement residents. Residents increasingly understand their specific conditions and strategise accordingly, which leads them to interact with formal and informal nodes of power within the city. As such, they can exercise agency, even where they may be quite reliant on clientelist relations with elites. They have learnt to navigate the clientelist networks and extract material benefits, while maintaining focus on their broader political project of recognition. But these strategies are not always effective, as the dismissive attitudes of elected officials still prevail, especially when dealing with residents who are unlawfully occupying land.

The question of scaling up remains a problem, as most of the upgrading interventions co-produced by communities and civil society actors encounter funding challenges. Unlocking finance to enable them to scale up is key to facilitating a more systematic, inclusive and sustainable upgrading framework. Also, at an individual level, more inclusive finance options would facilitate access to housing and basic services for low-income residents. There has been too much focus on market-based solutions, which makes it unattractive to invest in low-income housing and basic services. This is a key area in which policy interventions will be necessary; it must involve the state at both the national and city levels, as the state has the primary responsibility and capacity to provide housing and other services and to protect residents from market forces that may lead to their dispossession. It is then critical that any non-state interventions must obtain the state's full commitment and participation, to boost the state's technical capacity and improve state–citizen relations. There is also a need for integrating the upgrading interventions into wider urban planning processes which can perhaps help address the question of scaling up.

There is also a need for better coordination between actors engaged in informal settlements. There is too much competition for power and authority, particularly between customary authorities, MPs and councillors, but also between NGOs and donors seeking to address the shortfalls in state provision, for example, with off-grid sanitation solutions and other interventions in informal settlements. Local communities often have to engage with all of these actors in various capacities, such that they may end up shackled to relationships and processes that are not beneficial to them. They

may also get fatigued by the incessant engagements, including with research institutions. Safeguarding communities from ideological coercion whenever they engage with external actors must be a priority, especially where collaborative spaces are convened. It also requires that conducive policy frameworks must be put in place to facilitate the meaningful participation of communities. Reform coalitions must also acknowledge power dynamics within the settlements and ensure that less powerful groups are able to articulate their issues. Engagements with communities must be in a structured, reflexive and sustainable form, which also acknowledge the dynamisms within these groups, and without recreating problematic hierarchies.

Taken together, findings from the city studies indicate that legislative and policy reforms are necessary but must be accompanied by proper operationalisation. What we see is that there are legislative and policy frameworks at the national level, but all implementation is left to local authorities, which often lack proper frameworks to do this. Competing mandates between national and local government agencies and lack of coordination between them also leads to systems failure and a resulting blame game. Land tenure reforms may, for instance, be initiated by a department in the central government. However, their success will be limited where the relevant local authority that is tasked with service provision and collection of land rates is not involved in the processes. This suggests a potential argument for the designation of specific departments at the national or city levels to play a coordinating role when it comes to the affairs of informal settlements. But this must be carefully navigated to avoid the risks associated with centralisation, while paying particular attention to the gatekeeping hazards that may arise.

Finally, there should be specific policies for informal settlements to avoid lumping them together with other neighbourhoods in the city, given their specific needs. This can be done whilst recognising the multiscale nature of service provision across city space. Policies should allow incremental upgrading, given the resource constraints that many local and national governments encounter when it comes to provision of basic services and housing. They could, for instance, target existing housing stock for upgrading, even where these do not necessarily comply with the planning provisions. Clear frameworks for incremental intervention can also recognise community-led interventions and the capacities of informal settlement communities to respond to the challenges that they encounter. They also provide room for experimentation, reflection and learning, which are integral to the building of sustainable models that can address the needs of residents of informal settlements.

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Annex

Table 8: Overview of research methodology, tools and selected sites in the seven cities of the ACRC informal settlements domain

	Selected methodology	Tools employed	Selected sites (informal settlements)	Site selection criteria
Accra	Qualitative	KII, FGD	(5): Chorkor; Agboghloshie; Mallam; Madina; Tulaki	Traditional/indigenous migrant profile; urban and peri-urban character; drivers of growth; population density; tenure security; level of service investment.
Dar es Salaam	Qualitative	KII, FGD	(6): Rufu; Bonde la Mpunga; Makongo Juu; Hananasif; Mji Mpya; Goba	Level of settlement consolidation (including available trunk infrastructure services, especially roads); homogeneity/ heterogeneity in income level.
Freetown	Qualitative, Quantitative	KII, FGD, geospatial mapping	(3): Crab Town, Kolleh Town, Grey Bush (CKG); Moyiba; Susan's Bay	Geographic, environmental, socioeconomic and political conditions; existence of established relationships with local partners and community leaders; existing knowledge and data on the IS; trained community researchers who can conduct qualitative research on site.
Harare	Qualitative	KII, FGD	(6): Caledonia; Mbare; Stoneridge; Crowborough Paddocks; Churu Farm; Dzivaresekwa Extension	Old degenerating suburbs on council land; IS developed on land zoned for housing development on council or state land; IS on land other than housing (institutional or commercial spaces, and so on); peri-urban IS with unclear jurisdiction; IS engaging city for regularisation; IS on state land.
Kampala	Qualitative	KII, FGD	(2): Kisenyi III; Ggaba	Multilevel selection criteria (not detailed in the current report draft).
Lilongwe	Qualitative	KII, FGD, community service mapping	(4): Mgona; Mtsiriza; Kaliyeka; Senti	Unplanned settlements, where residents have no tenure rights or title.
Mogadishu	Qualitative	KII, FGD	(2): Kaxda; Hodan (districts)	Prevalence of informal settlements in the district, spatial location of the district (Hodan is located within the city proper, Kaxda is located on the outskirts). The spatial location of settlements in these two districts provides an insight into how informal settlements are organised, their access to services and what the impact of these elements is on the lives of informal residents living there.

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