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Governance for pro-poor urban development (reflections on the book *Governance for pro-poor urban development: Lessons from Ghana*)

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Introduction

I appreciate this opportunity from the editors of *Urbani izziv* to reflect on my book, *Governance for pro-poor urban development: Lessons from Ghana*. I have used this opportunity to highlight the global interest in cities and governance, to comment on the current state of knowledge and to show how this book contributes to the conversation.
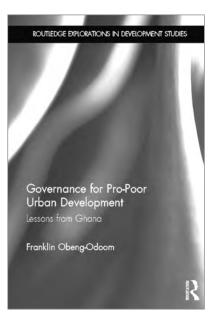
Growing interest in cities and governance

Cities and governance have captured global attention in the twenty-first century, leading Harvard economist Edward Glaeser to publish his *Triumph of the city* (2011). Cities do not always provide their residents the best services and comforts, ideas, company, wellbeing and contentment in life. However, governance, especially "good governance", has been widely acclaimed as the element that will make even a failed city a triumphant one. The "good city" (Ash, 2006), "arrival city" (Saunders, 2012) and "happy city" (Leyden et al., 2011) are all expressions used to show how cities can unleash their full potential through good governance. Throughout the world, this is the age of governance,

the era of the city and a period of good urban governance.

The current state of knowledge

Nonetheless, knowledge of governance is totally fragmented. The governance train is in town, but it is producing cacophonous sounds. In a recent article in *Governance,* Stanford University guru Francis Fukuyama decries the confusion in research on governance, especially how it is conceptualised and measured, and makes an urgent call for holistic studies on the topic. Fukuyama notes that "[b]efore we can measure good governance, however, we have to better conceptualize what it is" (2013: 347). He offers some guidelines about both tasks: conceptualisation and measurement. Regarding conceptualisation, he argues that governance should be understood as the state – or, as he puts it, "the functioning of executive branches and their bureaucracies" (Fukuyama, 2013: 347). He reverts to old debates about government and governance, but chooses a resolution that collapses the dichotomy: the government is the state and the state is governance. That is, government and governance are the same and interchangeable. In terms of measurement, Fukuyama is not content

with existing quantitative and disembodied indices and metrics. He advocates qualitative measures and considers the three crucial issues of capacity, autonomy and outcome. One by one, the measures are scrutinised and appraised. In the end, Fukuyama is dissatisfied with the outcome as a measure. He states that it is too difficult to attribute the outcome to the state or to governance. He argues that the ends of governance, however they are defined, are not always attributable to the state and, in any case, focusing on ends hides issues about process and implementation. Therefore, the new approach to measuring governance should address capacity (resources) and autonomy (how the state or government skilfully chooses and sets the agenda, and how it controls bureaucracies to achieve pre-determined outcomes), as well as the relationship between them.

What this book does

In *Governance for pro-poor urban development,* I address the conceptualisation and measurement of governance in the context of urban development in Ghana, although I also briefly consider the experiences of other African countries. This geographical focus is important because of the growing importance of cities in Africa and how governance has

been used as a political and economic concept for (and certainly as a solution to) all the challenges on the continent. Regarding conceptualisation, I agree with Fukuyama's view that the "change" from government to governance – and hence the tendency to consider the state as having withered or deterritorialised so much that other actors are more important – is fraught with problems. Where I part company with him is that attention should be given to different sources of power, both locally and internationally. The government is still important, as is the state, but there are other important actors in this process. The World Bank, for instance, has been very active in shaping the nature of the state. It has manipulated state institutions and supported not only marketisation of policies but also the marketisation of the state institutions responsible for implementing these policies. In addition, historical pressures, the local press and activists have transformed the state. It is no longer simply the government, and so the state and the government cannot be interchangeable. Indeed, the United Nations and global pressures on democratisation and accompanying conditions for aid are forcing the government to cede some powers to other parts of the state, outside the executive branch. In turn, the state cannot be regarded as merely the government even though its power to govern is intact and, in some cases, is growing. Therefore, any conception of governance that focuses only on local institutions and ignores major international forces and history – as Fukuyama does – misses a big part of the story.

Governance for pro-poor urban development provides a more holistic conceptualisation of governance. It sees governance as democratisation, entrepreneurialism and decentralisation (or DED). Each of these components has different meanings, of course, but it is not the individual ideas alone that matter; the whole idea, DED, also matters. This concept places attention on

the individual components, the whole and the interconnections among members of the cluster. Doing so challenges depoliticised views of governance and acknowledges (but also transcends) the stance that governance is merely a neoliberal project, as suggested in titles such as *Good governance in the era of global neoliberalism* (Demmers et al., 2012). Furthermore, DED helps analyse what happens when urban governance breaks down. Do people protest or do they vote? If so, do they vote at the ballot box or with their feet – and, if they do leave, might they move to another city? In other words, when urban residents are satisfied or dissatisfied, how do they express this verbally and what characterises their departure?

Regarding measurement, the book expands the suggestions for research on governance. I use the outcome test that Fukuyama dismissed, but I show that using outcomes to measure the quality of urban governance is not an exclusive, isolated or reclusive exercise. Instead of merely asking whether governance has succeeded or failed to achieve its outcomes, as Fukuyama prescribes, I examine the social, economic and political meanings of "success" and "failure". I also explore the various ways in which "failure" and "success" change over time, who they change for (individuals or classes), why they change and how they change (in terms of autonomy, capacity or economic structure). The analysis in this book therefore eschews simple binaries of "success" and "failure" and investigates how "success" and "failure" are constructed, how they co-exist and in what ways they are connected, dependent or interdependent. Fukuyama recommends rejecting output measures because outcomes are shaped by too many factors beyond the local level. For me, this is precisely the reason why outcome measures are needed. International development agencies "sell" governance with a great number of promises, and so those claims must be examined in relation to outcomes. In other

words, the outcomes test helps ascertain the congruence and divergence between the visions, missions, promises and material conditions of different classes of urban residents.

As with many political and economic issues, questions of data access, data quality and paradigm issues pose a considerable challenge when analysing governance. Often, only a particular survey is available and hence used, but (as Fukuyama correctly observes) depending on survey evidence alone and falling back on a particular statistical or econometric technique for analysis is woefully inadequate for the current urban challenge. Thus, I draw on a range of data and sources, surveys, government statistical compendiums and case studies in *Governance for pro-poor urban development*. In carrying out this analysis, it was necessary to engage various perspectives, especially drawing on my skills as a land economist, urban economist and political economist. As a land economist, I have developed great interest and skills in the workings of economic, social, political and cultural institutions and how they interact with urban land, and the role of land in the lives of different social classes and in the urban economy. As an urban economist that places cities at the centre of processes of social, environmental and economic development, I have a different orientation from neoclassical urban economists, who employ methodological individualism as an epistemic and analytical tool. I make no secret of my disquiet about their methods, which fare badly when applied to cities and urban systems that are the product of colonial and imperial influences. So, although I acknowledge this in my book, I avoid using it.

As a political economist, I understand "urban" as a system with penetrating influences that go to and from the local, regional, national and global forces of change. Continuity is crucially important, as is also the generation and

distribution of an economic surplus in urban development and social change. Viewing the matter as an urban political economist, I see local history as global history, and I see current urban development processes as organically connected to national and international development. If these processes are capitalist or have major capitalist drivers and logics, then their study should be informed by an understanding of how capitalism works in its various forms and shades in societies that actually exist. Combining this range of skills into what I call a "critical immanentist" approach provides fresh and helpful analytical insights because this is a blend of skills and views that are rarely combined.

Empirically, the book draws on experiences in Ghana. For me, this choice is appropriate because Ghana is widely regarded in the literature as one of the "big four" in terms of quality governance in Africa (Naudé, 2011). One of the other countries in this group, South Africa, is also analysed in the book, but Ghana is the centre of attention. Ghana was recently praised by David Cameron for its excellent economic growth record and enviable performance as "an island of peace and stability" (*Voices of Ghana*, 2013). Ghana is regarded as a "model state . . . whose democratic credentials can be taken far more seriously" (Bierschenk & Spies, 2010: 4). It is famed as a "Star pupil of the IMF" (Hutchful, 1995), and so this country is an appropriate case study of governance in Africa. Although this latter descriptor relates to Ghana's entrepreneurial governance or neoliberalism, neoliberalism in Ghana is not merely "[t]he usual: privatize and liberalize" version (Koechlin, 2011: 253). It is broader: an ideology, a social movement and a set of political practices (Stilwell, in press) that are grown locally, inherited from the colonial power and imposed externally. Entrepreneurialism is core to the conceptualisation of governance in this book, but it is not the sole feature. Decentralisation and democratisation are also key elements.

Governance for pro-poor urban development engages the pressing issues raised in Fukuyama's recent article, but the understanding, measurement and evaluation of governance addressed in the book are broader. Among other things, this book considers how economic surplus is generated and distributed not only between poor and the rich people, and between rich and poor countries, but also within and between other social groups. It not only examines the transformation of key social and economic classes spatially and temporally, as well as matters of continuity and change in urbanism, but also considers how to transcend the present operation and meanings of governance in the urban development process.

Conclusion

The current interest in governance and cities is substantial and is likely to grow, but matters of conceptualisation and measurement continue to impede a full understanding of this fascinating topic. Untangling these challenges constitutes a major challenge, one that *Governance for pro-poor urban development: Lessons from Ghana* seeks to overcome. I hope that it will shed much light on the current way of thinking and contribute to shaping the debate on governance, cities and development in a conceptual, methodological and empirical sense.

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Biography

Franklin Obeng-Odoom is the Chancellor's Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the School of the Built Environment, University of Technology, Sydney in Australia. His research interests focus on the political economy of development, cities and natural resources. He is also the author of the forthcoming book *Oiling the urban economy: Land, labour, capital, and the state in Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana* (Routledge, 2014). More about his work can be found on his website, http://obeng-odoom.com He can be contacted at Franklin.Obeng-Odoom@uts.edu.au

Information

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