

Local Urban Governance and the External (f)Actor: Aid Funds Coming into a Local Urban Governance Arena in Kinshasa

Inge Wagemakers¹

¹University of Antwerp, IOB - Institute of Development Policy and Management, Antwerp, Belgium

inge.wagemakers@ua.ac.be

During the last decades Kinshasa has grown rapidly (from 1million citizens in the '70s to about 8million today). This engendered enormous squatter areas housing millions of people. Despite its large population, urban planning and state services are quasi absent in the new areas. In the DRC one could speak of a weak state already, but in the capital's recent urban spaces state influence is even weaker. In the absence of state services, creative forms of everyday life and local governance emerge, as local actors try to manage goods and services themselves. Local governance is in the recent urban areas certainly not a mere reflection of formal urban governance institutions.

Because these areas are housing millions of people, foreign development programs start to operate there as well, often taking formal governance structures as departure points for interventions. But given the locally-specific, hybrid, 'new' mechanisms of local governance, development programs are entering a whole new arena that is not just following official urban governance rules.

This paper analyses the interaction between daily local urban governance and an external aid program in a recent municipality of Kinshasa. It seems extremely difficult for the external project to influence local governance mechanisms, because of the way the program is set up but also because of the specific way in which local urban governance functions. In Kinshasa's recent urban areas there is a very fragmented local governance in which the state is just one of many actors. Power networks and non-state actors determine local governance of goods and services. In this context the external development project comes in, trying to come to institutional change (aiming at buzzwords like empowerment, participation and democratisation). Yet, within the local context the project seems determined to fail (at least concerning its own goal of changing local governance procedures), as it operates on the one hand completely parallel to existing local political arenas and is on the other hand being inserted into local logics of governance and practical norms. We therefore argue that it is very difficult for an external 'structural' development project to come to institutional change in a context where governance is not determined by formal institutions or formal rules but by local individual actors and everyday practical norms.