URBAN INFORMALITY AND THE MAKING OF AFRICAN CITIES

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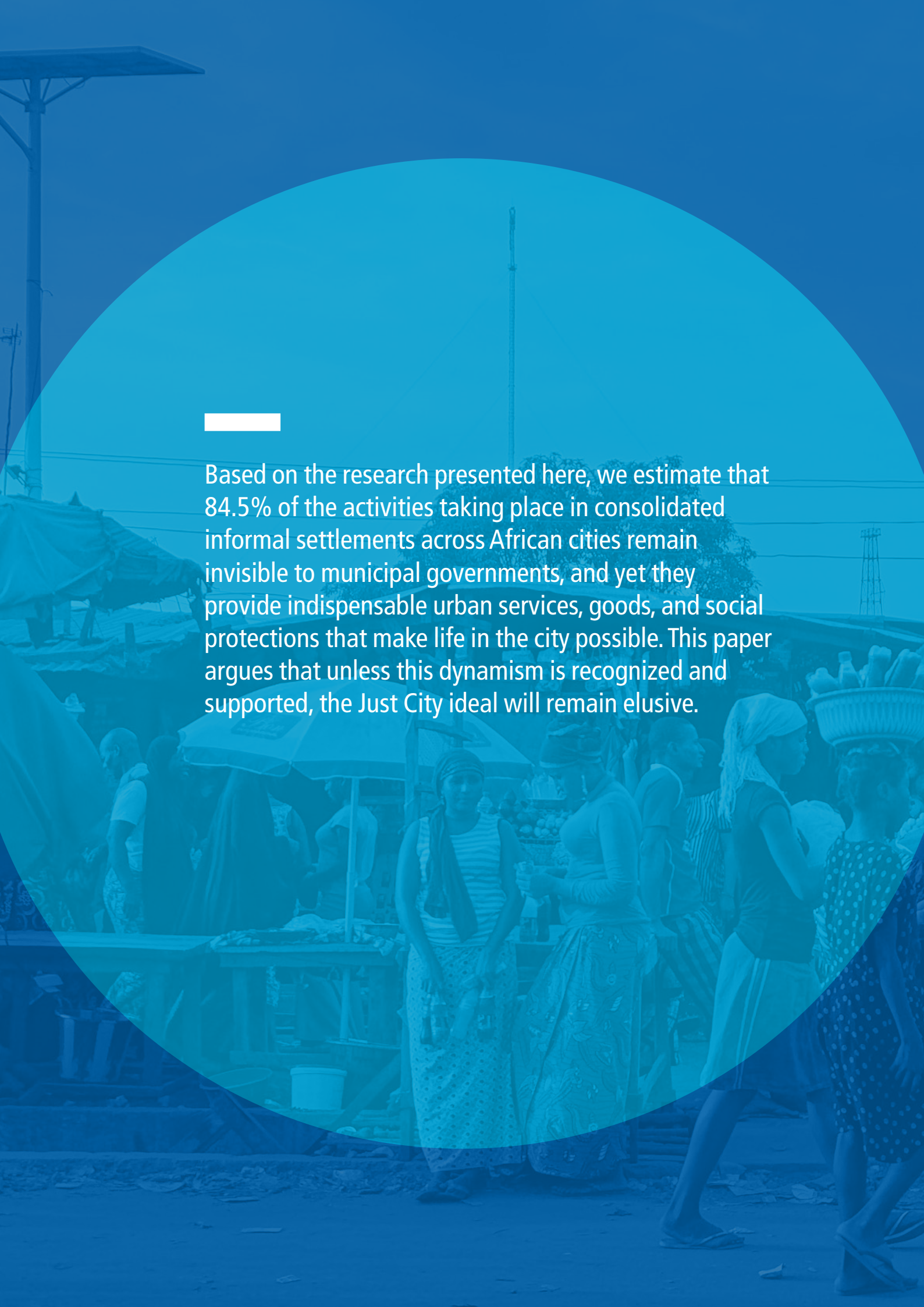
"The city is all of us …
we make the city."

Sara Nandudu,
Deputy Chair of Slum
Dwellers International

Based on the research presented here, we estimate that 84.5% of the activities taking place in consolidated informal settlements across African cities remain invisible to municipal governments, and yet they provide indispensable urban services, goods, and social protections that make life in the city possible. This paper argues that unless this dynamism is recognized and supported, the Just City ideal will remain elusive.

CONTENTS

Approach to Urban Informality

01

Despite the many prejudices, it has become increasingly clear that urban informality is a defining feature of our world. Informality can no longer be thought of as synonymous with poverty or marginality (Roy, 2009), but as a feature of advanced capitalism (Sassen, 1994).

Furthermore, mounting evidence supports the theoretical and empirical fact that informality is today majoritarian and that it does not necessarily fade with economic growth (Jutting & Laiglesia, 2009), and that across the globe, both North and South, most people (61.5%) work informally, making informal employment the norm. Statistics are undeniable: informal employment in Africa accounts for 85.8% of all jobs (ILO, 2018), and for 78% of all new jobs (ILO, 2020). In terms of city-building, experts concur that urban informality accounts for at least 60% to 80% of the existing urban fabric of developing countries (Chen, Kihato & Skinner, 2018). Africa underwent its urban transition in 2015 and it is projected to have the fastest urban growth rate in the world over the next three decades, most of it unplanned (OECD, 2020). These simple facts are reason enough to firmly place urban informality at the core of any conversation about what the just city in Africa ought to be.

It is impossible to miss the vibrancy of informality in African cities: street vendors are central to food security, informal transport modes keep the city moving, home-based workers offer care services that ensure economic activity. This realization comes in tandem with increasing statistical clarity about the scope of the urban informal economy, which is uncomfortably large, and its contribution to the continent's GDP. Informality is the main source of income for most people, and it is instrumental for the delivery of many urban services, so it is pivotal to the functioning of African cities. Informal service providers guarantee the flow of goods and services wherever formal conduits do not reach, and in this sense, informality helps cities function. Because African cities do function in a way that is not easily comprehensible and that is different from what planners assume and expect.

This paper defines urban informality as the predominant mode of city-making today, and as a range of activities that are essential for the progressive development of African cities. Despite its problems, informality helps cities function and raises people's well-being. In fact, without informal contributions in the form of income (informal employment), housing (informal housing and informal settlements or slums), and community services (informal care arrangements, informal water provision, informal waste recycling activities, and so on), people would be worse off.

Positive framings of informality in policy making are rather new. Only recently have governments adhered to supporting informality rather than to fighting it (ILO, 2015)) (Kiaga et al, 2020). And despite these new approaches, prejudices against urban informality abound within governments, academia, and in the streets.

The specific focus of this paper is the overlap between informal housing and informal employment. This view has been conceptualized by some as "home-based enterprises" (Tipple, 2014) and (Chen, 2014) or as "urban livelihoods" (Rakodi & Lloyd-Jones, 2002) and (Chen et al, 2016). In the current effort, attention is placed on understanding how space multitasks by detailing the granularity and range of informal activities happening within houses in informal settlements, and catering to the needs of its residents in terms of income, social protections, urban and community services.

This paper reveals that across the informal settlements studied in Uganda, Tanzania and Senegal, residential spaces host a wide range of economic activities and community services. Space-use intensity in consolidated informal settlements demonstrates that houses are much more than just houses, and that informal settlements are more than just residential areas; they are foremost economic sites of production. Here, housing

and employment cannot be differentiated (Carrizosa, 2021). These neighborhoods and their residents internalize the services they do not receive through formal channels. In other words, social protections and urban services are being co-produced by the citizens. People are contributing much more to making life in the city possible than their municipal governments. Rather than labeling this state of affairs as good or bad, the point here is to acknowledge the extent of these activities, so policy is able to fine-tune itself to these realities, and hence be more effective and more just.

Against this backdrop, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the world to recognize that residential space is an essential part of the public health infrastructure, and that homes are a fundamental component of the work infrastructure, during the crisis and possibly beyond. But let us acknowledge that, while working from home is a new experience for many, it has long been an indispensable strategy for those living in self-built homes in informal settlements. This means that learning about the way informal settlements offer income opportunities and services should be a worthwhile endeavor for any urban manager.

If urban informality is not a deviation from the norm but the norm itself, our understanding of it, and consequently, the way it is treated by policy, must radically transform. Unfortunately, when it comes to the design of locally relevant urban policy options, the scope of imagination is not only narrow, but dated prejudices about what informality is and how to curb it, persistently reemerge. Calls to rethink social protection measures and to enhance the productivity of the urban informal sector are only starting to be listened to and phrased (Guven & Karlen, 2020). And, while it is increasingly clear that social protection measures ought to be tailored to the way urban informality operates (WIEGO, 2020), the way these measures actually look like is hardly progressive or innovative. More must be done to arrive at more fitting measures to support urban informality.

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Informal employment in Africa accounts for **85.8%** of all jobs (ILO, 2018), and for **78%** of all new jobs (ILO, 2020)

Schematic Literature Review

02

The term "informal economy" was coined and introduced to the international development sphere through the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s Comprehensive Employment Mission to Kenya in 1972 following the previous ethnographic work of Keith Hart in Accra, Ghana. Since then, informality has been understood in at least four main ways, each with a different definition of it, a different causal theory that explains why it exists, and consequently different – and often opposing – policy recommendations. What follows is a schematic review of this rich and complex literature, following a framework suggested by the WIEGO network (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) (Chen 2014, Chen et al 2016), and extended with a fifth approach representing the current theoretical atmosphere up until 2019, when the pandemic struck.

FIGURE 2.1

Schools of thought on urban informality from 1972 to 2019

	DUALISM	STRUCTURALISM	LEGALISM	VOLUNTARISM	CONTINUUM
Definition of informality	Marginal activities not provided by the formal sector. Safety net for the poor	Outsourcing to microenterprises to increase competitiveness	Value not fxed as capital due to cumbersome regulations. Untapped capital of the poor.	Opportunity that seeks to avoid regulation and taxation (not always illicit products, but included)	Does not exist in pure form, grey zones, transactions, coproduction, local cooperative norms.
Relation formal-informal	Separated. Few linkages, Counter-cyclical, Substitues	Integrated, complementary. Pro-cyclical	Formal regulations are hostile for the poor. The poor by pass them but miss tapping their own potential	Opt in or out. Counter-cyclical for self-employed, pro-cyclical for independent workers	Inevitable linkages, permanent movement along continuum. Formality wants clarity, informality resists
Casual theory	Population growth unmatched with industrial employment opportunities. Unemployment. Productivity differentials	Competitiveness. Capitalistic drive breeds informality	Hostile legal system. Excessive government regulation creates informality	Rational choice. People opt put after a cost benefit analysis. Opportunity and tradition	What works prevails. Incomplete formalization attempts. Structural changes in work, labor precarization.
Policy options	More formal jobs. More economic growth. Industrialization, modernization	More labor regulation, increased unionization. Broadened social protection	Titling properties (formalization), cutting tape, deregulating (firm and construction permits), and expanding microfinance	Lower costs of formality. Unbundle social protections. Facilitate formalization. Change culture of non compliance.	Adjust rules to realities so as not to crowd out cooperation. Universal basic income. Continuum of land rights. Service coproduction
Critiques	Growth and development did not shrink informality. Not marginal nor disconnected. If pepole maximize, labor supply stretches.	Marxist dogmatism and limited applicability. Welfarism disincentives entrepreneurship. Disregards role of institutions	Naturalization of entrepreneurship, false promises (Mitchell 2005). Disregards infrastructure and social policy (Madrick 2001)	Overlooks outsiders for whom the formal not an option but irrelevant. Overfocus on mandatory pension contributions	Over-focused on the South. Policy approached trapped in dualism. Methodological stiffness.
Authors	Lewis, 1954, Hart 1972, ILO 1972, Harris and Todaro 1970, Maloney 1979	Moser 1978, Tokman 1992, Castells and Portes 1989; Sassen 2000	De Soto, 1989, 2000. Collier 1999, Loayza 1997, ILO 1993, ILO 1993, ILO 2003, IFC 2017	Maloney, 2004; Perry et al, 2007; Levy, 2012, Kanbur 2014	Ostrom et al 2006, Fergusson 2007; Yitachel 2009; Meager 2013; ILO 2015

Dualism

The dualist view of informality shapes the conventional understanding of the phenomenon, fixed in the very word "informal" that denotes contraposition between what is formal, official, correct, according to modern norms, and what is not. In essence, all traditional schools of thought dualist because they see a categorical opposition between formal and informal. Dualism sees informality as a process of exclusion whereby goods and services do not reach the margins of the formal sector. In this view, informality is driven by population growth unmatched with industrial employment opportunities, a problem of unemployment, in short.

Dualist policies advocate for more economic growth, increased supply of formal jobs, industrialization, and modernization of the economy. Initially, it was believed that the modernization of the economy would naturally expand formal jobs, and that a steady provision of enough low-cost social housing alternatives, would suffice to curtail informality. But after decades of failure to see these changes, dualist policies embraced a more repressive approach, making the parallel between informal and illegal more relevant, and mandating more control and supervision over unregulated realms. The dualist idea that informality behaves counter-cyclically is challenged by evidence from countries in Southeast Asia and Latin America where economic development has not curbed but instead accentuated informality (Jutting & Laiglesia, 2009). It is also contested by the Marxist critiques of the structuralist approach.

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Structuralism

In strict opposition to the marginalist perspective of the standard dualism, structuralism sees the informal as essentially linked to the formal, and moreover necessary to enhance economic competitiveness. Prominent advocates of this school of thought are Moser (1978), Castells and Portes (1989), and Sassen (2002). In short, structuralism sees informality as an outsourcing practice of big firms to microenterprises in their drive for competitiveness. Notably, structuralism does not preclude informality to developing countries but sees it as a universal phenomenon and a byproduct of globalization. In the North, and especially amidst innovations driven by digital markets, the precarization of employment is rampant.

In contrast to dualism, for structuralists the informal sector behaves pro-cyclically, so more economic growth will only exacerbate informality. This means structuralist policies advocate for more labor regulation, unionization, and social protection. In sum, more welfare not more growth. Theoretically speaking, structuralism, like most neo-Marxist ideas, has not been displaced but rather silenced by the neoliberal practicalities of the legalist paradigm.

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Legalism defines informality as the consequence of red-tape and imperfect property rights systems: excessive and costly rules cause informality.

Legalism

The most outspoken representative of the legalist view is Hernando de Soto, a Peruvian economist who successfully deployed a theory of deregulation, de-bureaucratization, and privatization, as a means to prosper out of poverty. In a nutshell, legalism defines informality as the consequence of red-tape and imperfect property rights systems: excessive and costly rules cause informality. De Soto claims that through deregulation and titling programs, it is possible to unleash 9.3 trillion dollars of dead capital that is buried in the assets of the poor around the world (De Soto, 2000). This optimistic, pragmatic and clearly neoliberal approach was embraced by the Doing Business (DB) indicator developed by World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC), leading to highly influential, yet controversial measurements of red-tape deterrents to entrepreneurialism of 190 cities across the world. The policy solutions of legalism are straightforward: land titling, labor flexibilization, e-services, and notably, microcredits. In sum, less and simpler rules should encourage formalization. In stark opposition to structuralist prescriptions, here the idea is not more but less government.

De Soto's thinking has had a profound impact across the world, in part because it resonated so well with the recipes of multilateral banking corporations: the structural adjustment programs of the 1990s and the public-private partnerships of the 2000s. But many deem legalism's popularity "politically placid" (Gilbert, 2002), (Varley, 2012), and (Davis,

2006). In fact, critiques of this view abound in the literature and are hard to disregard. The most salient critiques are: that statistics backing the analysis are spurious (Bromley, 2004:282), that the impact titling has on the mortgage market is overstated (Gilbert, 2002), and that concluding that the poor are naturally entrepreneurial is unfair (Roy, 2005).

Voluntarism

Not much different from a standard rational choice theory, the voluntarist school of thought on the informal economy comes mostly from literature and evidence from Latin America, a region of very high urban informality measures. The main idea of this theory is that people opt out of formality for convenience, and not necessarily because they are being excluded or marginalized out of the formal sector. Voluntarists like Maloney (2003), Hardill, Baines & Perry (2007), and Levy (2012), see fluid entry and exit movements between the formal and informal realms. This does not imply that people in informality are not poor nor that they are content with this status, but that it is unclear if they would be better off in a formal job for which they are qualified. Informality is often an optimal decision given specific circumstances, compared with the low level of formal sector productivity (Maloney, 2003). Preferring and remaining in informality, makes evident that market benefits from formal social protection schemes are narrow. More broadly, voluntarism denounces a lack of trust in the government.

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Voluntarist policies promote the transition and flexibility between formal and informal statuses throughout the life cycle of workers, and the unbundling or fractioning of social protections. Voluntarists generally assume that the movement between the formal and the informal ultimately favors formality, they hold that formalization policies are stronger than its countering informalization.

But this is simply not true. The informal economy is majoritarian and grows. Worse still, as neo-Marxists and structuralists would argue, the flexibilization of social protections contributes not to formalization but to precarization and further informalization.

Continuum

The current theoretical environment is one where thinkers share a disregard for the formal/informal discrete binary, and prefer to focus on the middle ground, the in-between realm, the gradual variations along a continuum. Authors talk about co-production (Joshi & Moore, 2004), continuum (Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur & Ostrom, 2006), grey zones (Yiftachel, 2009), coral reefs (Fergusson, 2007), linkages (Meagher, 2010), fractures or hinges (Simone, 2010:45), and constellations (Barry, 2015), to name a few of the most recognized terms. Acknowledging the shades of grey, I deliberately embrace the "continuum" term, honoring the work of Elinor Ostrom on informality.

One of the most important conclusions of the continuum approach is that informality is not unstructured, disorganized, and chaotic. "Such an association is conceptually unsound, empirically weak, and has led to policy disasters." (Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur & Ostrom, 2006). Further still, Guha-Khasnobis et al conclude that good and bad do not rest at either end of the formal-informal spectrum, so that more formal is not always desired, and more informal is not always a bad thing.

What we are used to refer to as informal, are simply practices that exist because they work, and because they do, they must be learned from. Labeling informality as bad blocks our understanding of what is really happening on the ground and hinders our capacity to help it thrive.

Forcing formalization on informal structures often crowds out well-functioning arrangements. Instead, what is necessary is to obtain a more granular knowledge of "informal" phenomena, and policies that are not too far removed from the realities on the ground, but that "just right reach of government". This approach highlights that the difference between a good policy and a bad one is the implementation capacity. Good measures, then, are those that "tailor intervention to the capacity of the structure" (Idem:13), rather than offer blanket solutions that must work everywhere because they worked somewhere. The continuum view does not favor grand policy interventions and argues that all too often "abstinence of the government is indeed a blessing in disguise" (Idem:5). Among the recommended principles for policy action are: subsidiarity (going as closer to the problem as possible, and that means starting at the community level before going to the local government), tailored packages of complementary interventions, and using "voting with feet" as an evaluation criterion for efficacy (Idem:15). Ultimately, the continuum approach requires a more granular knowledge of informal practices, so that policies can be smarter by getting closer to realities.

This paper argues that the continuum approach is a particularly promising one for African cities, because policies can leapfrog outdated paradigms, and also because with sound research and courageous leaders, it can help reconnect, validate, and legitimize what Africa has always been: the oldest continent, with a wealth of knowledge in what "living together" entails.

Making the "Urban Invisibles" Visible: Examples from Kampala, Dar es Salaam, and Dakar

03

This project believes that governments should do a better job of making their cities more just by supporting people living and working in informal settlements because they contribute more to the local economy and the community than what is acknowledged.

People often use their living space as working space, and also provide social and community services that are needed and not found publicly. For policy to get smarter at supporting people, experts need to recognize that a house in an informal settlement is much more than a place of residence. Houses are also economic and social assets. In houses people work, offer community services, maintain businesses, and save for the future. So, instead of penalizing or turning a blind eye to what people are doing, governments need to recognize these activities and support them with a range of programs and services that are fine-tuned to their actual capacities and needs. For example, home improvements like better construction materials, lighting, water, or ventilation can mean better child-care services and health conditions. Or training programs can be the difference between an unpaid mortgage and sustainable entrepreneurship.

Changing the narrative gear of conventional development documents, this section walks the reader into three houses in three capital cities, namely, Kampala, Dar es Salaam, and Dakar, telling a visual story of how houses are used. This is a rather intimate view into the lives of typical residents of consolidated informal settlements, people that are not necessarily poor, nor rich, but whose way of using space speaks of how average citizens make urban life possible. "Consolidated informal settlements" are mostly self-built urban areas that used to be on the outskirts of the city, but that have developed gradually over time and are now part of the built-up fabric of the city. These old peripheries are more densely occupied, have better urban services and tenancy arrangements, and include middle-income areas (Ward, 2015).

Before delving into the house stories, a few comments are necessary about the conceptual and methodological approach guiding the field work data collection. Conceptually, this qualitative research is centered on the term "space-use intensity", a concept that is inspired in time-use research that studies multitasking (Carrizosa, 2021). In particular, it draws on survey techniques that use photographs to aide interviewees offer more complete information about the activities they do on any given day (Gershuny et al., 2017). Following Jacobs' (1969) ideas about mixed-use, "space-use intensity" addresses two key variables in spaces that multitask:

1. granularity (the internal parts within an observed unit) and

2. range (a variety of types of uses).

or, in simpler terms,

1. different users within a house (independent households or independent businesses) and

2. different uses within a house (residential, commercial, industrial / manufacturing, services, and 'green'–- recycling or urban agriculture-).

The purpose of space-use intensity data is to document a detailed count of the discrete uses and users within the studied houses, a simple but comprehensive tally.

Now, in terms of the method, a few comments are important. The approach used is called "house interviews" as opposed to "resident interviews". The idea is to have a conversation with residents guided by a set of prepared questions and have them tour the interviewer through the house who takes impromptu photographs of every space. The

house interview methodology interrogates the space itself, and documents how spaces are put to work through nine steps. The first five (notebook jottings, photographs, field notes with sketches and quotes, and spatial diagrams) were done by the local researchers, the next three (reading photographs, second column notes, and visual record) were advanced in a debriefing meeting with the lead researcher, and final tally of the variables was consolidated last. Each local researcher selected the houses to interview based on two simple criteria. First, that houses were located in typical or average neighborhoods (not the poorest nor the richest, but middle-to-low income) in consolidated informal settlements, and second, ease of access (rapport guaranteed).

The nature of this research is qualitative, meaning it does not intend to provide generalizations but mere illustrations. The numbers that will be discussed in the last part of this section are to be taken as indications of the extent of intensity of use, not as statistical evidence that can be generalized to a larger population.

Agnes's house in Kampala

North of Lake Victoria sits Kampala, former seat of the Buganda Kingdom and capital of Uganda. The metropolitan area of roughly 200 square kilometers is home to 3.5 million people. Kampala spreads throughout 24 low flat-topped hills surrounded by wetland valleys that are mostly encroached upon. Administratively, it is divided into five divisions and a hundred parishes.

This is Agnes's house in Masanafu, Lubia parish, Rubaga division. She's been living here for over a decade with her three children and her father whom she takes care of. Agnes runs a loaning business and describes herself as a businesswoman. For the local government, hers is a residential unit. However, our research identified 11 additional uses happening alongside her living quarters.

Some uses in the front of Agnes's home: Vegetable and cooking stoves stall (left), shoe shop (center), and briquettes for sale (right)

In front of her house facing the street there is a food stall, there are banana trees that she uses for her own consumption and also to sell in the stall. In the shaded veranda there is an open space, where her community group can meet. Agnes also has a shoe shop and exhibits different models here. In the front, she also has some chickens.

Some uses in the back: Briquettes machine (left), water tap (center), and toilet stalls (right)

At the back of her house, she has a water tap. In the past, she used to sell water to neighbors, but she argues that business is no longer good. She also has a space dedicated to store and dry solid waste, which is used in the production of briquettes. She stores the briquette machine at her place, so often community members gather at her place to produce them.

FIGURE 3.1

Visual record of observed uses in Agnes's house

Official uses

Observed uses

Back				Front	
A	Water tap / for sale			A	Vegetable and stoves stall
A	Solid waste management			A	Shoe shop
A	Briquettes production			A	Briquettes sale
A	Shared toilets (occasional)			A	Meeting space for CDO
A	Agnes' house			A	Banana garden
Inside	A	Elder care		A	Poultry
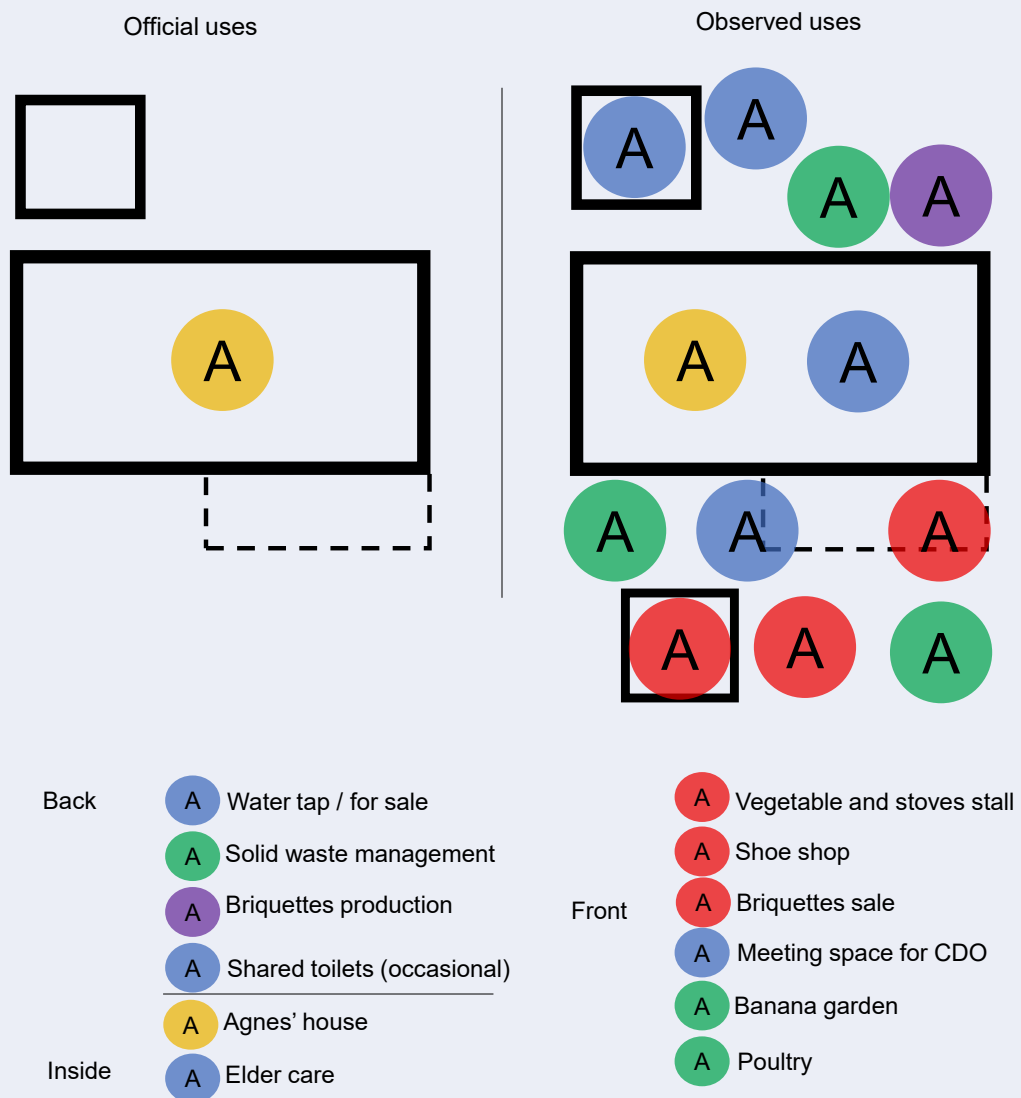
Neema's house in Dar es Salaam

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's largest and fastest growing city, is situated on the Swahili coast of the Indian Ocean. The metropolitan area of roughly 1,400 square kilometers is home today to 7 million people, three-quarters of whom live in informal settlements. Administratively, Dar es Salaam is divided into five districts subdivided into wards.

This is Neema's room in Ubungo district, where she shares the space with a friend. The house has five other rented rooms. Neema makes samosas and other pastries, mixes peppered spices, and makes soaps, which she sells on the streets. Neema also uses the space outside of her room in the backyard to host weekly traditional ceremonies and dances from her tribe in which the whole neighborhood gets involved. She receives some stipend for it.

Neema making spices next to stored metal (left), shops from tenants (center), sports betting stall (right)

This is a corner house and facing each street there are commercial activities. Neema's samosa shop is next to one selling fried chips. There is also a vegetable stall, grocery shop, a cooking gas refill station, and a nail polishing shop. On the other street there is a sports betting shop with some slot machines. Other tenants of the house use the shared outside space to raise chickens, make batiki, recycle metal parts, and produce juice to sell.

FIGURE 3.2

Visual record of observed uses in Neema's house

Official uses

Observed uses

Back

A	Metal recycling
F	Batiki making
C	Chickens
C	Juice making and selling

Inside

A	Neema's room A
A	Samosa shop
A	Soap making
A	Traditional ceremonial space
A	Spiced pepper making
x	Rented rooms B, C, D, E, F

Front

|	
G	Nail polishing
H	Vegetable stall
I	Groceries
J	Fried chips (sub-rented)
I	Cooking gas refill station
K	Sports betting/ slot machines

Traoré's house in Dakar

Senegal's capital Dakar is situated on the
Cap-Vert peninsula on the Atlantic coast.
The metropolitan area is roughly 550 square
kilometers and is home to 4 million people, of
which at least 40% live in informal settlements.
Administratively, the department of Dakar is divided
into four arrondissements and 19 communes
d'arrondissements, composed of banlieues
(suburbs).
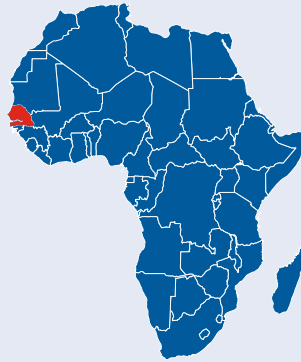
This is Traoré's house in Grand Yoff commune
d'arrondissement. Traoré is the third of four
children. He and his siblings lost their father in
2005. Ten years ago, they began building on what
were some barracks. Towards the street there
are three shops and the entrance to the villa: a
hairdressing salon, a multiservice shop and an
imports shop selling second-hand appliances. The
shops earn Traoré an income of US$386. They have
independent meters but share the bathroom inside
the house.
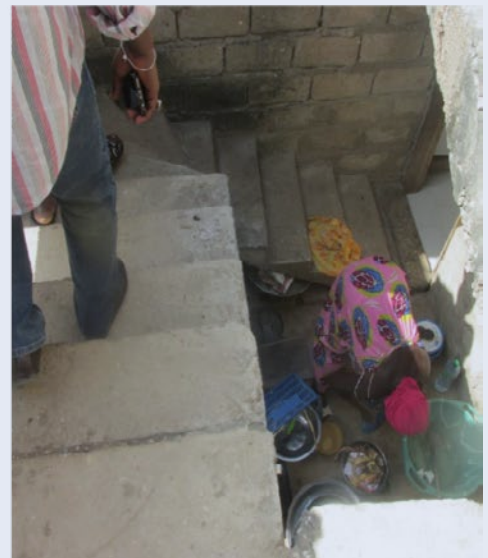
Traor''s family room of four (left), the corridor / guesthouse (center), and the open-air stairs in the kitchen (right)

The house has four rooms, one for Traoré's family of four and the others for his brothers and their
respective families. A total of 15 people live permanently in this house. The corridor connecting the
rooms and the shared kitchen is used as a guesthouse for newcomer migrants from the south of
Senegal, and is also used by a footballer, whenever he's in town. In this space guests boil tea and
keep their belongings. The stairs to the upper floor are in the kitchen, which is problematic for it
presents security issues, as they offer direct access to the most private part of the house.

Sheep enclosures (left), food containers and drying clothes (center), shee''s waste recycling (right)

The real business of the family is sheep farming. They own 50 pure-breeds and keep them in three enclosures at the rooftop. The sheep were given by the government to Traoré and his brothers after their father's passing. This business brings in an average of US$8,570 per year and is especially profitable during festivities. In fact, the family wishes to construct a third level to construct more sheep enclosures and expand the business. The rooftop is also used to dry clothes, keep the sheep's food, and recycle their waste, which is sold as fertilizer.

FIGURE 3.3

Visual record of observed uses in Traoré's house
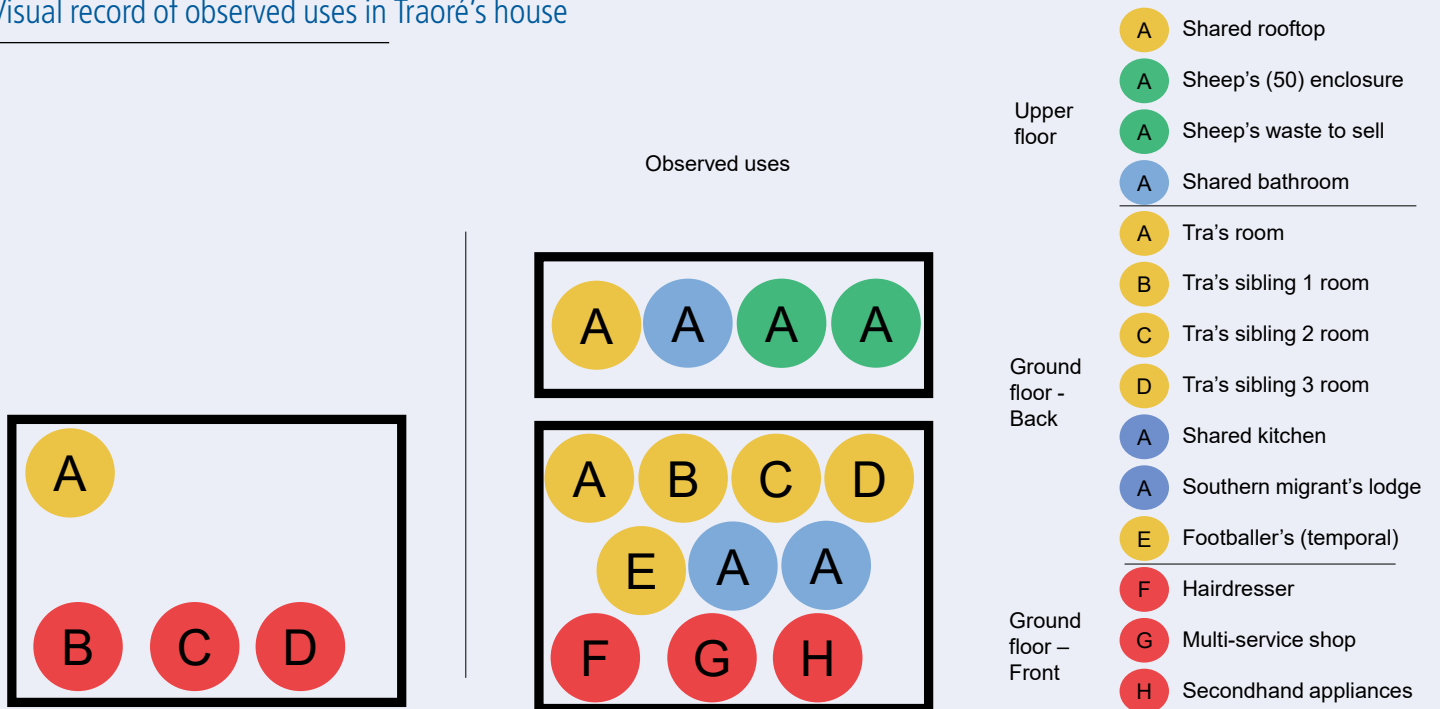
Results from the house interviews

A visual summary was drawn for each of the 12 house interviews (Figure 3.4). These summaries are the basis for a complete list of space-use intensity variables (Table 3.1). All numbers in the table can be obtained by reading the visual diagrams, ultimately by counting the number of colors and letters detailed in the legends of each diagram. A more comprehensive analysis could engage with greater detail in area measurements, density calculations, visits at different schedules (Kapinga, 2021), and more precise official information on each site. For the current exercise, the two more important variables analyzed were: "use-units" that reflect granularity (number of independent households or business units per house, represented with letters) and "use-types" reflect range (categories of uses often found on land use maps: residential, commercial, services, industrial, etc., represented with colors). Before getting into the analysis of these two variables, a few comments are pertinent about the methodology itself and the process interacting with the three groups of local researchers in Uganda, Tanzania, and Senegal.

→ **First,** it is fair to conclude that the methodology deployed was successfully adapted and applied across different contexts. Local researchers, all of whom were experienced, explicitly mentioned that they found it a useful, engaging, and novel way of looking into these settings. Notably, because the emphasis is placed on the house rather than on a single interviewee, researchers can collect data from neighbors and different family members for a more rounded and thorough perspective (Kisembo, 2021). More importantly, the input from local researchers strengthened the process, because in clarifying and supporting each data point in a group debriefing meeting, implicit bias can be identified and corrected via a collegial triangulation.

→ The **second** comment on the methodology is that it revealed that the very idea of what is a house varies widely. Of course; as a unit of analysis, a house is universal, and is never devoid of meaning. But what a house entails in each context may differ considerably. To some, a house is a single room rented out within a larger structure. To others, it is a structure with several partitions and no windows, kitchen, or bathroom. It can also be a larger building with several rooms for members of various nuclear families and even guests, in other cases, it is a plot with ample spaces for crops and livestock. In this exercise, local researchers exercised their discretion selecting the houses to be surveyed, within two firm criteria for selection. The first criterion was ease of access, that is, that enough rapport with the interviewee was assured within the tight timeline of the project. The second was that houses were reflective of a "typical" living arrangement in their city, not poor not rich, not fully formal nor fully informal. In other words, "consolidated informal settlements" (Ward, 2015), where the shades of grey between the formal and informal could be appreciated.

→ The **third** conclusion about the methodology is that the use categories (residential, commercial, services, industrial, and green) were relatively straightforward to identify. Two specific points could be revised to fit better the type of evidence that this data contributes. One, "storage" uses should be recorded, as often warehousing areas are indispensable for carrying out businesses elsewhere (the methodology only records those linked to recycling). The other point of improvement is a more precise definition of what the "services" entails.

It is important to differentiate service uses that are commercial (for example, an office that sells micro insurance) from services that offer public goods (be their facilities or amenities) to the community (for example toilets, water, spaces for community meetings). This distinction could be crucial for urban planning purposes and should be improved upon on future iterations of this research.

FIGURE 3.4
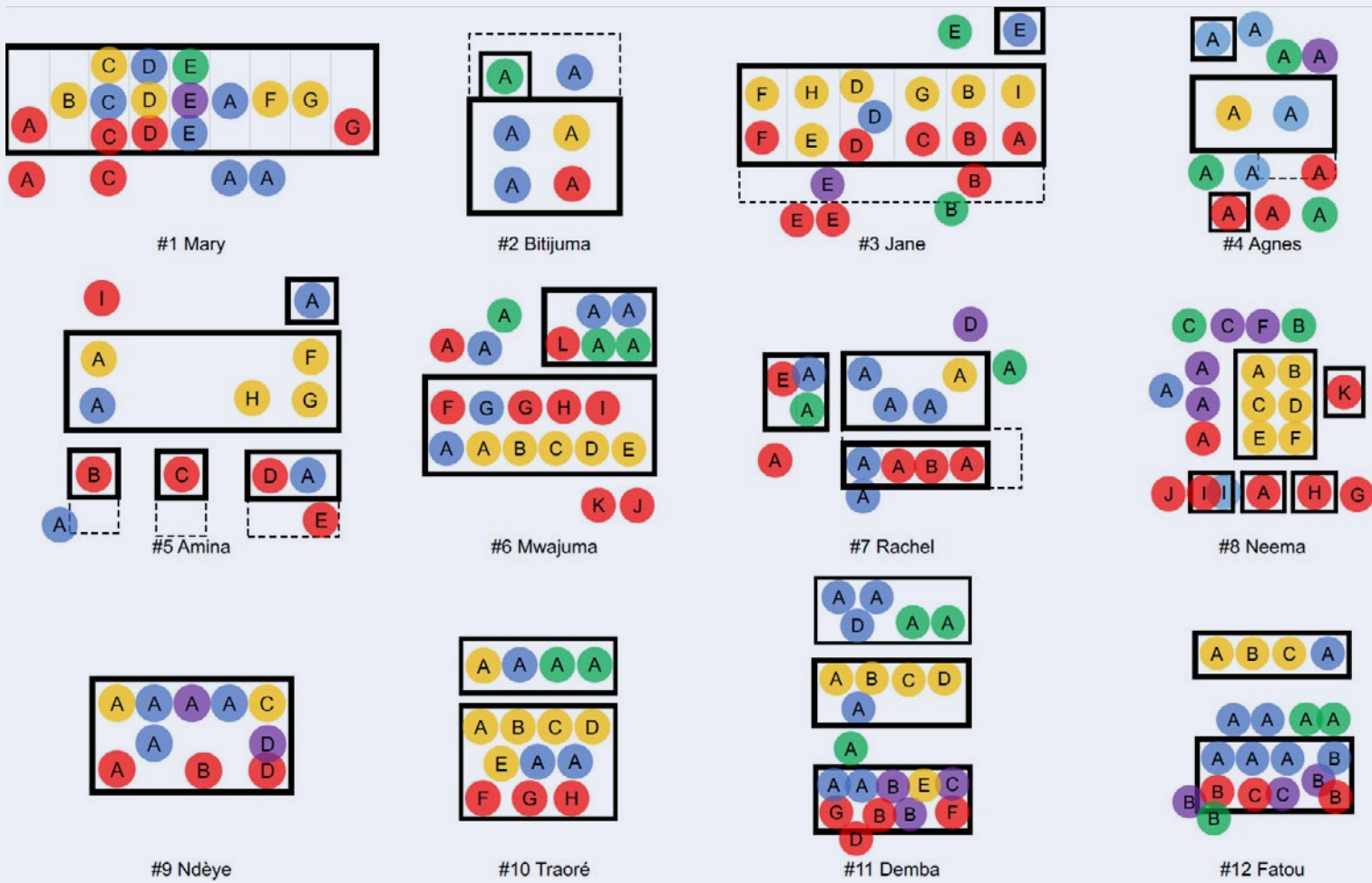## Visual summary of all house interviews

#1 Mary   #2 Bitijuma   #3 Jane   #4 Agnes

#5 Amina   #6 Mwajuma   #7 Rachel   #8 Neema

#9 Ndèye   #10 Traoré   #11 Demba   #12 Fatou

TABLE 3.1

Complete list of space-use intensity variables in the sample

Interview #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
Name	Mary	Bitijuma	Jane	Agnes	Amina	Mwajuma	Rachel	Neema	Ndèye	Traoré	Demba	Fatou	
City	Kampala	Kampala	Kampala	Kampala	Dar	Dar	Dar	Dar	Dakar	Dakar	Dakar	Dakar	
Observed use units (letters)	7	1	9	1	9	12	5	11	4	8	7	3	6.42
Observed uses (colors)	4	4	5	5	3	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	4.50
Total count of uses observed	20	6	20	12	14	19	15	20	10	14	21	18	15.75
Residential	5	1	7	1	5	5	1	6	2	6	5	3	3.92
Services	6	3	2	4	4	5	6	2	3	3	6	6	4.17
Non-economic	11	4	9	5	9	10	7	8	5	9	11	9	8.08
Commercial	6	1	8	3	5	8	5	7	3	3	4	3	4.67
Industrial	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	4	2	0	3	3	1.33
Green	1	1	3	3	0	3	2	2	0	2	3	3	1.92
Economic	8	2	12	7	5	11	8	13	5	5	10	9	7.92
% Residential	25.0%	16.7%	35.0%	8.3%	35.7%	26.3%	6.7%	30.0%	20.0%	42.9%	23.8%	16.7%	23.9%
% Economic	40.0%	33.3%	60.0%	58.3%	35.7%	57.9%	53.3%	65.0%	50.0%	35.7%	47.6%	50.0%	48.9%
% Services	30.0%	50.0%	10.0%	33.3%	28.6%	26.3%	40.0%	10.0%	30.0%	21.4%	28.6%	33.3%	28.5%
Total count of recognized uses*	4	1	4	1	1	2	2	2	2	4	3	3	2.42
Invisible uses	16	5	16	11	13	17	13	18	8	10	18	15	13.33
% Visible	20%	17%	20%	8%	7%	11%	13%	10%	20%	29%	14%	17%	15.5%
% Invisible	80.0%	83.3%	80.0%	91.7%	92.9%	89.5%	86.7%	90.0%	80.0%	71.4%	85.7%	83.3%	84.5%

* Estimates based on: # of business licenses and independent meters (per interviews) and OpenStreet Maps Humanitarian Open Database of Buildings in Dar es Salaam (2021) `

Lastly, having the same type of data from previous research in Bogota, Colombia (Carrizosa, 2021), allowed for interesting comparisons. A crucial one is that the diagrams used to map the uses visually had to be plan views rather than cross-sections, due to the fact that urban development in these African cities is less dense and more sprawled (Bhanjee & Zhan, 2018). This fact speaks of a potential for vertical development in African cities that is yet to be tapped (Baziwe, 2021). Consolidated urban areas are in general less compact, and hence they hold more potential than their Latin American counterparts for densification. Another interesting comparative insight is that less vertical consolidation is associated with more granularity (a larger number of use-units cohabitating within the same building or property).

TABLE 3.2

Comparative summary of averages of space-use intensity variables from all house interviews

Variable	Kampala average n=4	Dar es Salaam average n=4	Dakar average n=4	TOTAL average n=12
Observed use units (letters)	4.5	9.25	5.5	6.42
Observed uses (colors)	4.5	4.25	4.75	4.50
Total count of uses observed	14.5	17	15.75	15.75
Residential	3.5	4.25	4	3.92
Services	3.75	4.25	4.5	4.17
Commercial	4.5	6.25	3.25	4.67
Industrial	0.75	1.25	2	1.33
Green	2	1.75	2	1.92
% Residential	21.3%	24.7%	25.8%	23.9%
% Economic (ind, comm., green)	47.9%	53.0%	45.8%	48.9%
% Services	30.8%	26.2%	28.3%	28.5%
Total count of recognized uses*	2.5	1.75	3	2.42
Total count of invisible uses	12	15.25	12.75	13.33
% Visible	16.3%	10.3%	19.9%	15.5%
% Invisible	83.8%	89.7%	80.1%	84.5%

*Data on officially recognized uses was estimated using multiple sources. For Tanzania, the Humanitarian OpenStreetMaps database of buildings was consulted. For Senegal, interview data on business permits was considered, as was on Uganda, where the latest approved Land Use map was consulted (KCCA, 2012)

As shown in the table above, houses hold much more than one single household, and much more than residential uses alone. In fact, residential uses in the described houses are less than 24% of the total uses observed. In other words, the residential use is merely a quarter of what is happening in these houses. The economic uses within the houses, that is, either commercial, manufacturing of any kind, recycling and urban agriculture, represent more half of what happens inside these houses: 50.3%. Finally, services, meaning community areas, urban services like water or sanitation, or commercial services like repair shows, account for 28.8% of the uses within these houses. This is a high percentage compared to previous findings from houses in consolidated informal settlements in Bogota, Colombia, where services only account for 3%.

These findings reveal that informal settlements cannot be thought of as residential areas, because doing so would render invisible too much work, services, capacities, challenges, and possibilities. For policy to be smarter at dealing with urban informality and support it better, a more detailed knowledge of what happens in informal settlements is indispensable.

This exercise is also useful for going beyond the claim that the just city should include the "urban invisibles" (FES, 2020). With this small sample, which is not statistically representative but qualitatively, we are able to estimate the extent of what local governments are ignoring. Based on our research in these three cities, we estimate that 84.5% of the activities are being ignored. In other words, one could say that 84% of African cities are yet to be recognized, understood, and supported.

FIGURE 3.5

Space-use intensity data from house interviews in Kampala, Dar es Salaam, and Dakar *Source: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung-The New School, 2021*
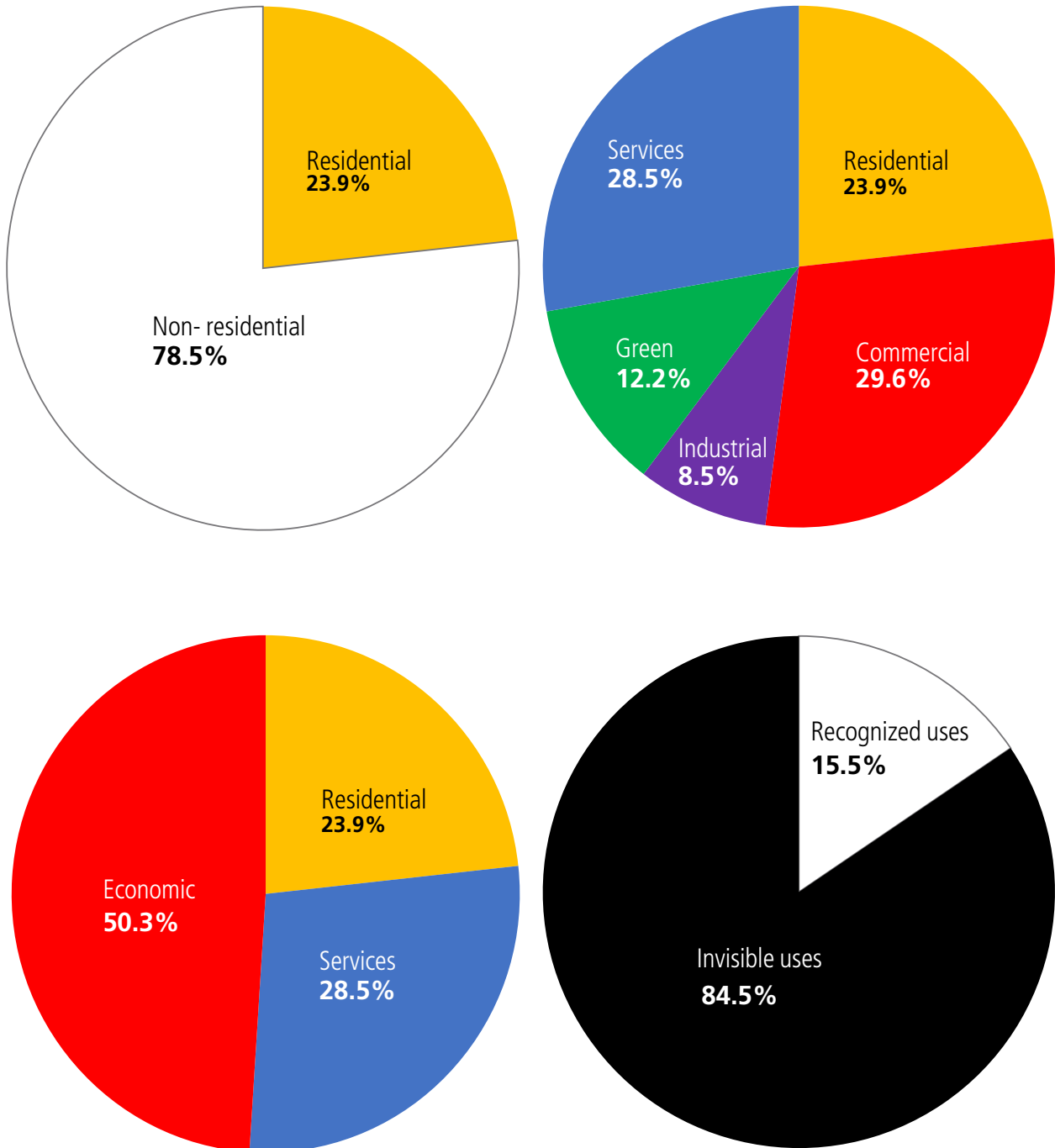
Figure 3.5 makes it quite evident that informal settlements are much more than what they are believed to be by urban regulations. The charts show that only 23.9%, or less than one-fourth, of the space in the houses is used as a residential area; slightly more than half of the space is used for economic activities. So, these houses are not just places where residents live; they are also places where residents work and earn a living.

Urban life entails more than just having a place to sleep. The houses also serve as service providers. In consolidated informal settlements, residents provide for themselves and their communities whatever is not provided for them by the city governments. This shows that consolidated informal settlements are first and foremost sites of economic activity. Secondly, they offer a cadre of urban and community services that are needed to make life in the city viable, livable, as well as socially and economically sustainable. They are not just neighborhood residential areas. The intense use of space in these houses is a lesson in city-making by the people to the policymakers. The message is clear: *City-making is a localized practice that entails a balanced interaction between housing, urban services, and economic activities.*

Local Experts' Perspectives on Urban Formalization

04

This final section channels the voices of some African experts from Uganda, Tanzania, and Senegal, as collected in online interviews between November and December 2021[1]

The conversations gathered the views of public officials, community leaders, and academics actively involved in formalization policies, both urban (that is, of housing and settlements) as well as of businesses (be they shops, rentals, trades, or manufacturing of any kind) in their cities. The African experts' perspectives are presented below in three blocks. First are comments that define the problem, second explanations about how to better frame the problem, and third ideas about how to solve the problem.

Defining the problem

INFORMALITY IS NOT THE OPPOSITE OF FORMALITY – BOTH ARE PART OF A GRADIENT, A MIX

Many experts acknowledge that informality does not exist in direct opposition to, nor is isolated from, formality. Informality has long been "a victim of excessive dichotomy", states Cissé, who insists dualism should be replaced with "trialism", discriminating two types of informality (Cissé, Gueye & Sy, 2005), one more beneficial than the other. He takes this argument further, stating not only that there

are types of informality but also grades of formality. For this Senegalese expert, urban formality is informalizing, it is changing so that: "the formal is becoming less formal" (Cissé, 2021). Nnyka also recognizes this formal-informal mixture in Dar es Salaam:

> Our settlements are unique in the sense that they accommodate all classes. There is more spatial mixture between different incomes, and between formal and informal, which do not look that different … informal settlements are not settlements for the poor. Formal ones have better services, but they also have informal services. (Nnkya, 2021)

This experienced public officer and academic goes further and asserts that this "mixture actually helps regularization policy" (Nnkya, 2021).

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1   The experts interviewed are: Oumar Cissé, Executive Director, Institut Africain de Gestion Urbaine and Chair of the African Network of Urban Management Institutions (ANUMI) in Senegal; Gaston Kikuki, Director of VIBINDO Association of informal traders of Tanzania; Tumsifu Jonas Nnkya, Former Director of Housing, Ministry of Lands, Housing and Human Settlement Development, retired professor Ardhi University in Tanzania; Albert Nyiti, Assistant Research Fellow at the Institute of Human Settlements Studies (IHSS), Ardhi University, and housing specialist from The Just City Working Group in Tanzania; Dave Khayangayanga, Acting Director of Housing, Ministry of Land, Housing and Urban Development of Uganda; Sarah Nandudu, Vice-Chairperson of the National Slum Dwellers Federation of Uganda; Amin Tamale Kiggundu, Head of Department of Architecture and Physical Planning, Makerere University in Uganda; and Dorothy Baziwe, Executive Director, Shelters and Settlements Alternatives (SSA) Uganda Human settlements Network. Their personal interviews will be cited in the text using their last name and italics, to differentiate from other sources. The details of each interview are listed as part of the bibliography

To have mixed-income settlements accelerates formalization efforts and helps provide more diverse economic environments, as higher income neighborhoods demand locally available products and services that can be offered by lower income residents, thus creating and energizing local markets. On the same topic and with incisive precision Nandudu, a seasoned Ugandan community leader, explains this same phenomenon in Kampala:

> We have big developments, but they also need cleaners. These cleaners cannot afford to go there from very far. This is why we need the informal in the formal. We need housing typologies that can accommodate different categories of people as we transit from informality to the formal. (Nandudu, 2021)

She calls this type of mixture "inclusive formality", and explains that without it, "people will just sell what they have made in the city and go back to the village. This is bad, this means people would lose it all." (Nandudu, 2021).

Strongly committed to Southern knowledge-production, Nyiti, a young scholar based at Ardhi University in Dar es Salaam, is also observant of the informality in the formal, and the numerous gradients and mixtures between the two:

> In the interphase between the formal and the informal there are a lot of layers and interaction between these layers that are easy to miss, unless one is very careful. There are so many forms

of informality in the formal. This complicates the way we should be labeling them, because many unplanned settlements are not informal settlements any longer as they've been regularized. And many formal settlements develop informally so they become unplanned. (Nyiti, 2021)

Nyiti details three types of urbanization:

1. "formal but unplanned" (formal with informal origin),

2. "informal but regularized" (informal formalized), and

3. "planned but informalized" (formal but informalized). Navigating these mixtures is crucial, and sadly, it does not happen enough: "

These layers, these realities, are not documented, so we are indeed missing a lot" (Nyiti, 2021). The lack of documentation, clarity, visibility, and legibility about these realities is problematic. It is a kind of blindness, as will be explained below.

BLINDNESS THAT GOES BOTH WAYS

In his 2007 book, Why Planning Does Not Work, Nnkya denounces the "professional blindness" of planners. In this ethnography land-use planning (or anti-planning) he argues that planners fail to see the opportunities for inclusive planning that become available with community input. He contrasts this blindness with the job of land surveyors, who walk the land and see more, and make an effort to translate into lines in paper what they see on the ground. The book shows how it was a residents' regularization plan that was executed (thanks to a court ruling) while the local government sat, irrelevant, in their office (Nnkya, 2007). This "fable" of planning blindness and assumed irrelevance is, sadly, widespread. It should be a call to open eyes.

The extent of professional blindness to what happens in the city is widespread. Professional or technical knowledge is restricted to the small percentage of the city that is not informal, which at most is 30% of the city (Nnkya, 2014) (Cissé, 2005). Accordingly, the rules are designed for that meager 30%, and outside of it, they have no impact. For instance, in Uganda, the Registration of Titles Act (amended in 2020), the Building Control Act (2013), and Condominium Property Act (2001), exist only for the formal real estate (Baziwe, 2021). The rules overlook (and are overlooked) by informal urban developers. Nandudu believes urban regulations should never disregard those that in effect are making the city – the people themselves. In terms of businesses, it is the same: "Rules are designed for formal employment, they have no meaning in the informal sector" (Kikuwi, 2021). This is why Kikuwi argues that rules should be designed by those who know the issue at stake best; and adds: "Business people know their trade better than everyone. And people who spend their time reading and writing do not." (Kikuwi, 2021). Even those in the government acknowledge that: "We need to use different lenses to understand these realities" (Khayangayanga, 2021).

To be fair, the blindness goes both ways. People living and working in informal systems know very little of about formal systems. As explained, this partly has to do with the fact that formal and informal are so mixed, so that "those living in it do not see the difference between formal and informal" (Nnkya, 2021).

At the same time, a more disconcerting idea was raised by long-time Makerere academic Kiggundu:

> All we see here is informality, informality, informality. We need to see something different at work. We need model cities within the

developing world. Like the small green city of Putrajaya in Malaysia, funded in the 70s. We need to see how a functioning city looks like. (Kiggundu, 2021)

It is important to confront directly and seriously this kind of "worldling" impulse (Ong, 2011). How does one respond to African aspirations that emulate global models of sustainable cities? Disregarding these impulses can surely lead to the irrelevance of Just City campaigns, relegated to only persuade those who are already convinced.

THE SPEED OF FORMALIZATION – THE TIME OF EACH SPACE

When thinking about formalization, that is, about "changing the informal into the formal" (Nandudu, 2021), the speed of change expected can be the difference between success and failure. Khayangayanga, the Director of Housing at the Ugandan Ministry of Land, Housing and Urban Development, assured is that: "More attention should be put to the pace of formalization. If you move too fast, you can kill nascent businesses" (Khayangayanga, 2021). Ostrom et al described in this common governance problem and guarded against the "crowding out" of functional informal systems by enforced regulations from above which fail to pace themselves and adapt to the realities on the ground (Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur & Ostrom, 2006).

Formalization is, and needs to be, a long path, so it can give time to settlements, businesses, and buildings to accommodate change. "Some of these steps have to be gradual and some need to have limits" (Nandudu, 2021). Nandudu argues that it is crucial that formalization policies do not expect complete changes suddenly but gradually. She thinks each formalization step needs ceilings for different business sizes and capacities.

Baziwe, the Executive Director of SSA, a Ugandan human settlements inter-stakeholder network, gives an example of this when she explains why SSA advocates for occupational permits to be granted after 75% of the construction has been completed (Baziwe, 2021). This is less than 100% (which would be expected if fully formal), but still high, in order to ensure more security and stability of dwelling constructions. Embracing of gradual progressive changes is not necessarily a lowering down of expectations altogether, but an understanding that many areas are made in time, little by little. "Planners [and regulators] need to understand that informality has no clear solution, there is no other way but to work progressively, gradually" (Kiggundu, 2021).

The pace of formalization is one aspect of understanding the time of each space. Another aspect is the more literal way in which cities operate at more than beyond a single schedule. How they remain functional during the day, at different days of the week, and at night.

> In Belgium, you cannot buy toothpaste at 11pm. Here in Kampala, you can, there are shops everywhere [and anytime]. So why say our cities don't work? Night markets are a concept that could be more innovatively explored…One could close a street from 6-10pm so that farmers can set up stalls and sell, provided that the government offers public lighting. People are used to bring produce to roads, this is how they perceive roads are for. What if this is accepted at some times? (Kiggundu, 2021)

Thinking of space in terms of time is something that "progressive development" has long done across Africa and the South. But "progressive development" theories, practices, and policies have been recurrently overlooked or forgotten, as will be described below.

Framing the problem better

MISSED INNOVATIONS, EITHER FORGOTTEN OR OVERLOOKED

Urban informality has long been in the face of the governments, academics, and the people in Africa. Plenty of innovations – theoretical, practical, and legislative – have been deployed. Sadly, the topic seems to suffer from a Sisyphean fate, inventing and reinventing innovations that get forgotten or erased by prejudices, or by incomplete understandings. For instance, half a century ago:

> In 1972, Tanzania issued a national law recognizing progressive development. It acknowledged that informal settlements are there because of our policy failures, failures of the system to deliver housing and services. 1972, that is even before ILO coined the term informal sector, even before Vancouver, before UN-Habitat existed, Tanzania recognized these settlements and argued they should not be eradicated but supported. (Nnkya, 2021)

Nnkya explains that this 1972 policy meant a paradigm shift, reversing the more punitive 1960s law that advocated for slum clearance. With it, Tanzania understood informal settlements as valuable investments; the 1972 policy meant political recognition of informal settlements. In 1978, it also inspired the architecture and planning programs at Ardhi University to gear its curriculum to respond to this law. Ardhi incorporated lessons on upgrading and taught students how to physically improve the settlements. Even though the curriculum did not expose planners and architects to business and tenure topics (which were only reflected in urban laws in 1995), this was completely innovative at the time (Nnkya, 2021). This disciplinary focus is still innovative, and sadly, uncommon.

Another example of missed innovations or potential is the one mentioned by Kiggundu, the head of the Architecture and Physical Planning Department at Makerere University. He critiques the way decision makers not only misunderstand informality but also forget and scorn African traditional values, simply because they do not conform with Western paradigms. Kiggundu argues that it is nonsensical for local governments to disregard the contributions to maintain urban infrastructure of communities, inspired in traditional practices. An example is Kiganda's "bulungi bwansi" practice of "community service", that instills in people a love to care for their place, their nation, and their kingdom. Bulungi bwansi encourages communities get together to fix a pothole in a road, or clear the bushes, and these types of activities. However, the local government does not allow it. "The KCCA [Kampala Capital City Authority] argues citizens cannot construct nor fix roads, because they do not know how to do it well. Denying this impulse to collaborate, denying people's dynamism is absurd, when in fact the government does not have the capacity to respond everywhere." (Kiggundu, 2021).

In a similar vein, Ndezi and others highlight the theoretical potential of the maisha bora" or "good life" principle, which they compare to to UN-Habitat's Prosperity Index. Maisha bora is indeed quite powerful as a more rooted theoretical construct that can synthesize and efficiently communicate complex and interrelated urban topics. Interestingly, Ndezi's research has shown that maisha bora prioritizes livelihoods, among the many issues (Ndezi, et al, 2020). Taking traditional concepts more seriously could help in making policies that adequately address the most daring challenges, like designing workable urban financing models. "We need to be more imaginative and more inclusive. Informality needs to be thought of as an opportunity for city revenue" (Kiggundu, 2021). A scholarly and pragmatic attitude that does not overlook but incorporates traditional knowledge, values, and everyday practices, is a more sensible approach. Recognizing the inputs,

and not just the drawbacks of informality, is simply a more reasonable baseline for public action.

Incorporating grounded types of knowledge has proven difficult. On this point Nandudu explained the hurdles faced by Slum Dwellers International (SDI) self-enumeration data collected from more than 7,700 slums worldwide. "We have done a lot of enumerations but local governments are taking a lot of time to accept them. Their bureaucratic systems do not recognize ours…they feel community data is not authentic" (Nandudu, 2021) Khayangayanga confirms this and explains that at first "local governments claimed the data was informal, not standardized. But then there was a process with the Ugandan Bureau of Statistics and the World Bank, after which there is some appreciation for this data, especially since SDI collects data more regularly than what the governments are able to do" (Khayangayanga, 2021). However, despite some acceptance gained, the actual use of this data by the local government is very narrow. "Now it is mainly used to identify local community projects (Khayangayanga, 2021), this is a gross underutilization of a highly detailed and actionable data resource.

MINDSET ISSUES

Urban informality has stigma attached to it that obstructs learning from it. The idea of taking advantage of it, of making the most of its potential, remains problematic for both technicians and welfarists alike. There is much learning, and some unlearning to be done. Kiggundu advocates for the "need to introduce short courses on slum upgrading and informality to benefit city managers, planners, private sector and NGOs … [we need to] train new change agents and leaders in city planning and management… even at the parliament, because it is them who decide on the national budget" (Kiggundu, 2021). In a similar vein, Kikuwi explained that: "the biggest challenge to recognition is the mindset from the authorities.

They see informality as a nuisance, as stubborn. They can't think outside the box, they don't see there is no box! 97% of businesses in Tanzania are informal" (Kikuwi, 2021).

Kiggundu goes further to claim that: "We need new types of leaders… more imaginative, more talented, more flexible" (Kiggundu, 2021). But he is not confident this is easy, because: "Schools have not changed much in the last 60 years. Teachers are mostly trained in Europe, and they come back wanting to implement what they learned there here, which is impossible… what people like me studied in Western schools does not work here" (Idem: 2021). "The things that matter in African cities are not prioritized in Western schools…the conventional planning system does not recognize informality, yet the reality is mostly informal" (Idem, 2021). Southern urban planning, while active and promising (AAPS, 2021), is not seen as mature enough, not even within the continent. Knowledge production and theory building remain anchored in colonial structures that see Africa as an immense repository of data to be cropped and extracted from, at best, with assistance from local universities (Pieterse, 2015).

WHEN THE PROBLEM IS NOT INFORMALITY BUT FORMALITY

Tanzania's former Director of Housing and Urban Development Ministry and retired professor bluntly claims: "Our interventions in informal settlements do not work" (Nnkya, 2021). Indeed, stories about formalization projects, programs, or policies that, while well-intentioned, betray their own purpose abound. Even though their unjust outcomes get engraved in the minds and hearts of those aware or old enough to remember, the same type of initiatives resurge again later, with slightly different guises.

The Namuwongo slum upgrading project in Kampala is well remembered by many. Initially it was deemed a success for being able to erect 135 new houses in a former slum. But

the residents found themselves incapable of adjusting to the requirements of a formal settlement, like paying utility bills, garbage fees, and the like, so most sold their rights and went back to encroaching someplace else, creating a new slum elsewhere (Baziwe, 2021). Kiggundu sees this as an example of how formalization that includes only physical upgrading and overlooks local economic development, ends up being "planned eviction" (Kiggundu, 2021). Leader of local, national, and international community savings groups (BAMU, NSDFU, and SDI), Sara Nandudu explains: "if there's no affordability, we are simply doing a very polite eviction … if houses are too expensive, people cannot afford to live there and this leads to automatic self-eviction" (Nandudu, 2021). Cases like this abound; hard-fought and well-intentioned but incomplete, and hence destined for failure. Clearly, if the urban invisibles are not understood and seen, planning, even if well-meaning and sound, will bypass them.

Similar experiences have happened in business formalization. For example, Kikuwi got involved with VIBINDO in 1998, when Dar, "as a result of its new city master plan, started persecuting informal traders, beating harassing, confiscating their goods" (Kikuwi, 2021). The informal business people got organized, not so much to fight back, but to guarantee representation. Twenty years later, the government issued the Blueprint law (GoT, 2018), removing 200 regulations to facilitate formalization: e-registration of businesses, national e-card, and the like. However, "its impact is very minimum …worse than that, de-formalization is what they actually do. The government is encouraging more informality" (Kikuwi, 2021). Not the outcome these De Soto advocates expected.

Reflecting on the history of housing policy in Tanzania, Nyiti is not optimistic. He explains that the first independence policies of the 60s strove to help the poor and to make housing central. While good-intentioned, resources were scarce, so the state-led housing provision efforts resulted in few houses being built and much slum clearance (Nyiti, 2021).

Later, the housing policy shifted to embrace sites and services projects where the government provided land and access roads, but people built their own houses: "We were told you need to own your own house" (Nyiti, 2021). While this might have provided a solution to the scarcity of resources and weak government capacity, it had an excessive emphasis on home ownership that only works for some. He concludes: "The government is not being fully responsible for the mess they've created: the government is not helping the people get from point A to point B" (Idem, 2021).

Another example of the problems with formality is when formal businesses deliberately informalize recently formalized areas. Baziwe sees this frequently happening in open areas or public spaces in upgraded informal settlements that fought to get schools and community spaces, but which are taken up by corrupt private investors, entrenching new cycles of urban informality. Speculators see some of these areas as development opportunities and purchase the land from those who do not own it, so they can claim ownership (Baziwe, 2021). This sort of ill-intentioned, perverse re-informalization is bound to happen more in settlements and communities that are more consolidated, and which have struggled for their urban services the most.

Solving the problem

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF FORMALIZATION?

This question was the centerpiece of conversations had for this paper with public officials, civil society leaders, and academics in Kampala, Dar es Salaam, and Senegal. As a rule, experts initially gave a single straightforward answer: "To widen the tax base, that's it, nothing else" (Kikuwi, 2021). All of them had much more to say about this, and to many, it was very clear that formalization has different purposes for different stakeholders.

Baziwe was most thorough in addressing the multiplicity of perspectives. She detailed six perspectives. "For the city government, formalization means order," she said. For the slum dwellers, formalization means paying taxes that they don't want "because they don't feel taxes tie back to a way of supporting their businesses grow … [taxes are not] being reflected in the development that they are getting" (Baziwe, 2021). For civil society organizations, formalization means having more services for the community. For policymakers, it means having "functional investments", that is, safeguarding the investments done by and for the high-income urban development areas, while guaranteeing the small-scale businesses that service them. For real estate private developers, formalization works the most, because it attracts more middle- and high-income businesses to an area. But for informal real estate actors, formalization is the worse, because it closes their scope, as their business thrives in unclear tenure systems (Baziwe, 2021).

Nyiti concurred with this faceted view, saying that for the government, formalization's purpose "is to have an accountable central system, to be able to know what there is" (Nyiti, 2021). For slumdwellers, he added, formalization is the way to have security of tenure, which is a positive thing for them,

since it enables accessing a "bundle of rights." He said that for academics, formalization is missed opportunity. "It means we are not curing the problem. Because as we regularize, more people move to the outskirts" (Nyiti, 2021). He's not only concerned with uncontrolled urban sprawl, but with the fact that urban planning is not done from a Southern perspective, giving tools directly to the people who are really making the city.

Nyiti also explained that for the local government guaranteeing access roads is an important requirement for formalization. He argued that the "regularization project, the *Urasimaji Wa Makazi Holela*[2] is some sort of *baptism* where town planners [give existence to these houses on the maps] while land surveyors [do it with beacons on the ground]" (Nyiti, 2021).

With two decades of experience as a Ugandan housing policy officer, Khayangayanga argues there are three main purposes of formalization from the government's perspective. With regards to business, to widen the tax bracket (curiously, he did not mention this in relation to property taxes (Mirondo, 2021)). With regards to housing and settlements' formalization, to provide urban infrastructure. Lastly, another purpose is to combat urban crime better. Here, he mentioned that the National Identification System helps tracking down unlawful activities (Khayangayanga, 2021)

From Kiggundu's perspective, there are at least three types of purposes.

→ One is **physical upgrading or modernization**. He regards upgrading as beneficial because public investments (be they new roads, or modern markets) are followed by people's voluntary improvements.

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2 *Urasimaji Wa Makazi Holela*, the Swahili name for Dar es Salaam's most important regularization policy (geared towards road accessibility) is automatically translated as "Arbitrary Settlement Bureaucracy" (Google Translate, 2021), a sort of omen for its uselessness.

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→ The second type are **simply organizational mergers** like the associations of matatus and boda boda drivers promoted recently by the Ministry of Transport (a model to be followed in other urban sub-sectors) (Kiggundu, 2021).

→ The last type mentioned were the **updates to urban physical standards**. Kiggundu gave the example of the re-zoning of the upscale neighborhood of Kololo to reflect recent small-scale commercial developments. Tellingly, the example shows that if this can be done for higher-income areas, it can be done in of lower-income areas as well.

Sara Nandudu concluded that there was nothing wrong about the policies, especially since she's appreciative of the fact that KCCA officers have expressed interest in partnering with communities to improve the settlements. "I think this purpose is good, however the question is how is it going to be done. We may have to do away with the slums or informality, but the people must not be done away with. The how is the question" (Nandudu, 2021). Insights like this make it evident that there was more agreement on what the policies should do, but less clarity and consistency in how to put them to work. And, as was mentioned before, how not to betray formalization's very purpose when enacting the specific policies.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE PURPOSE OF FORMALIZATION?

Many experts concur with the realization that formalization should not be a purpose in and of itself, and that as a policy intention, it is simply wrong. Furthermore, the idea that the goal of formalization is integration is incomplete. As many experts have noted, integration alone, and legibility of informality into government structures, is far from a desired endpoint.

Cissé, who is not only a wide-ranging expert on urban informality (with research in solid waste management, urban agriculture, and flooding in informal settlements, among other issues) but is also recently interested in Senegalese city politics, explained:

> The issue is not to formalize; this is not the way to produce the city. The formal production is failing to produce a system with equity and diversity. Informal actors have the capacity and have proven to be successful providers of sustainable solutions. If you formalize, the risk is that you'll lose this capacity; and governments do not have capacity to spare, their capacity is already very limited… There is simply too much opportunity here to ignore. (Cissé, 2021)

One of the most detailed statements about what should be the purpose of formalization policy came from Kikuwi, leader of the VIBINDO Society, a member-based organization of informal manufacturers, traders, and service providers. Kikuwi argued that "the purpose of formalization should not be to formalize, the purpose should be transformation … transformation from informal to formal" (Kikuwi, 2021). "There are two components to transformation" he stated.

"One is **recognition**. We need to understand better who workers and businesses are in terms of gender, age, sector, and why they work in what they do…

the second component is **incentives**: conducive working spaces, finance, social protection, skills' training, appropriate technologies, and marketing" (Kikuwi, 2021).

Such a two-pronged approach to formalization, with recognition and supportive components, is fundamental. Cissé concurred with this when he stated: "Recognition might not be enough: the objective should also be to support" (Cissé, 2021). Khayangayanga talked about a "supportive infrastructure", that goes beyond physical and legal support, and also considers information systems that can be useful for regular citizens.

Indeed, to see formalization simply as integration of informal activities into the official structures will hardly ever be regarded by citizens as beneficial. Many authors have discussed the evils of "pernicious assimilation" that drains the livelihoods out of informal practices, and gives little back (Kamete, 2018). In other words, "there is no right without on obligation … the government has no right without servicing its people" (Kikuwi, 2021).

From Nandudu's perspective, the link between housing and livelihoods is what makes formalization work well. "Housing makes formalization affordable," she stated, adding: "Housing determines the type of informality you have. Housing is key to transform formality into formality. [Formal] housing should respond to economic factors that can allow people to have a business at home. This is important because it's important that people can afford moving from informality to formality" (Nandudu, 2021). Her perspective goes to the core of the problem with formalization and hence to determining what working formalization policies should be like. If formalizing and remaining formal has a cost, then it should envision a way by which people can afford these costs and thus reap the mutual benefits of transformation. Formalization without incentives, without a supportive structure, is nothing else than a mirage.

CO-PRODUCTION OF URBAN SERVICES, GOODS, AND SOCIAL PROTECTIONS

As was made visually evident through the house interviews, informal settlements, with their associated informal employment and informal businesses, act as providers of urban services and goods that would not exist otherwise, and that benefit its residents and the city as a whole. These include accessible and affordable housing options, water, day care for children, community meeting spaces, and many others. Acknowledging informal dynamics is a necessary starting point for a more effective municipal action. The urban challenges and deficits are broad, deep, and growing fast, so it makes no sense not to take advantage of existing efforts and support informal provision of urban goods and services, so they raise their quality and extend their reach.

A co-production approach to urban goods, services, and social protections reconceptualizes public provision not as a matter of "the-state-does-it-all" or "the-private-sector-does-it-best", but one that welcomes inputs from more stakeholders, especially those who are majoritarian subjects and objects of government action. "Wicked problems like informality, and in fact, like most African problems, cannot be solved without collaboration" (Kiggundu, 2021). Numerous examples of synergistic collaboration between public and informal stakeholders to improve service provision have been documented across different sectors (Meagher, 2013), such as waste management (Nzeadibe, 2013) (Parra, 2020), water and sanitation (Ahlers et all, 2014), housing and urban planning (Watson, 2014), social protection (Tokman, 2007) (Steiler, 2018), to mention a few.

Understanding informal housing arrangements as playing social protection roles is for many a simple fact of life. Houses with intense uses, especially economic uses, offer protection for their residents in times of need, acting exactly as social insurance (as a source of life insurance in times of death, severance or unemployment payments, and the like). It does take some degree of intellectual flexibility to understand that social protections can take many forms, and that some of those forms can be spatialized, even photographed, if one dares to look close enough. In fact, the concept of social protection is one that for laypeople is not straightforward: "Sometimes there are challenges just explaining to informal workers what formalization is.

For example, simply grasping the meaning of social protection is hard for many. It is an empty idea, too abstract" (Kikuwi, 2021). But at the same time, using their spaces as social protection is just a natural way of getting by in the city.

Spatialized forms of informal provision of social protection were made most evident in the conversation with residents of the house interviews in Senegal.

For example, Demba confided that the 300,000 francs (USD$510) per month he gets from leasing the two stores at the front of his house was a great support after his mother passed away. 'Without this money we would not have been able to get by because our income was not substantial at the time," he said. (Ndiaye, 2021). In another interview (#9), Ndèye confided that without the informal activities related to leasing her house, it would be almost impossible for her and her small children to survive after the death of her husband. Today, apart from the food store run by her eldest son, Ndèye's main income comes from the activities that take place in her home. The same applies to Fatou [house interview #12], a widow interviewed in the Medina district. (Ndiaye, 2021). This is far from unique across geographical and social spectrums: "Informal houses of older persons are being used to support their pension" (Cissé, 2021). In other words, "housing is the pension of the poor" (Torres in Carrizosa, 2021).

For Nandudu, not only houses, but also social networks can act as informal social protection. She referred to the role of "welfare committees" in informal settlements. She explained that well-knit communities are "what makes them to be a family and they stay united. So, if one has a problem, others can come in and help. For example, if one member lost a child, other members will come in and support her or him" (Nandudu, 2021). For Nandudu, these social support structures are connected to both the economic and psychological health of neighborhoods: "These networks can cost people's lives" (Nandudu, 2021) she said, highlighting their vital role.

MAKING CO-PRODUCED URBAN PROVISION JUST

Co-production understands, pragmatically, that when addressing joint state and market failures, partnerships are the key to achieve effective, on the ground, scalable success. This is one of the reasons why for local governments it is indispensable to recognize informal activities – not to erase informality, but to lay the true baseline from which to build a more just system, to lay bare people's assets, however fragile, fractioned, or seemingly disorganized they look on the surface.

The intense economic and urban services activities happening in consolidated informal settlements should not only be recognized but also supported. Without support, co-production can become exploitative (Miraftab, 2004), and hence an opportunity for redistribution is missed (Chen, 2006). Without a creative, spatialized, and unbridled support structure to help informal service provision of goods, services, and social protections to perform better, there is little hope of attaining the Just City we want.

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05

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