

Between Neglect and Control: Questioning Partnerships and the Integration of Informal Actors in Public Solid Waste Management in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

AXEL BAUDOIN, CAMILLA BJERKLI, YIRGALEM HABTEMARIAM,
& ZELALEM FENTA CHEKOLE

Abstract: The paper addresses the long-standing role of informal actors in solid waste management in Addis Ababa. Large numbers of people make a living through scavenging, waste collection and recycling. The varied and shifting relations between these actors and the local authorities are examined. For the most part, the authorities have largely neglected informal waste collectors. Recently, however, the role of informal actors was recognized and the authorities attempted to establish a “partnership” with informal actors in the waste sector. The paper discusses the consequences and problems involved in this partnership and how it facilitated political dominance and surveillance in a context of authoritarian governance. Informal actors have frequently resisted attempts at taxation and have avoided any collaboration with and control by the authorities. More generally, the paper concludes that political manipulation, poor accountability, lack of opportunities for participation, and the ensuing mistrust among informal actors towards local authorities prevent any successful integration of the actors and their interests in the public management of waste in the studied setting.

Introduction

Informal forms of work are the dominant income activities in many cities in developing countries, providing livelihoods for millions of people.¹ A proportion of these people make a living through activities in the informal waste sector as waste pickers or scavengers, itinerant buyers, and small-scale recyclers. They are often stigmatized and many are poor. In some cases, though, people working in this sector earn non-negligible incomes.² Scavenging also stimulates other economic activities by producing raw materials for industry and artisans. Informal waste recycling also has value from an environmental point of view. More generally, the informal waste sector plays an important role in the context of fast growing cities experiencing inadequate formal service provision. In spite of these various benefits, the attitudes of local governments are often characterized by neglect, lack of recognition, harassment, or even attempts to eradicate informal activities.³

A growing number of scholars advocate proper recognition and support of the informal sector in solid waste management (SWM).⁴ Rouse, for example, states: “There is a need for a

Axel Baudouin is associate professor of Geography at Norwegian University of Science & Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway. **Camilla Bjerkli** is currently completing a doctoral dissertation on waste management and governance in Addis Ababa. **Zelalem Fanta Chekole** has an M.Phil in development studies and social change from the Department of Geography at Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) and is presently working as Regional Planner at the Federal Urban Planning Institute, Ministry of Works and Urban Development in Addis Ababa. **Yirgalem Habtemariam** has a Ph.D in Geography from NTNU and is presently senior lecturer in the department of Geography at the University of Addis Ababa.

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v11/v11i2-3a3.pdf>

paradigm shift in the way informal sector service providers are viewed ... these enterprises are vital parts of the urban services simply responding to and effectively meeting customers needs.”⁵ There are also calls, in both the academic and donor literature, for policies aimed at integrating informal actors into municipal SWM strategies.⁶ Such calls are often underlined by the view that an efficient SWM cannot be achieved by municipalities alone but rather in association with several partners, including private, formal and informal as well as community-based organizations (CBOs). On the ground, however, we have witnessed in the course of our research in Ethiopia serious conflicts in the concrete relationships between authorities and informal operators in the solid waste sector. In some cases, as this paper will show, the conflicts are so serious that informal actors, far from seeking recognition, prefer to “escape” by refusing any contact with the municipality. Alternatively, local authorities totally ignore the contribution of the informal sector. In this paper, we explore the troubled and changing relationships between informal actors and local government in the solid waste sector in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Categorizing relationships between informal actors and the state

The attitudes of authorities towards informal waste actors reflect cultural perceptions, including those relating to caste, ethnicity, and social class. Social stigmatization is particularly pronounced when it comes to workers in the waste sector.⁷ Although governments often view informal waste actors in a negative way, their attitudes and relationships with these actors can vary. Medina classifies these attitudes and relationships, with reference to the waste sector, into four categories:

Repression – Many governments and social groups consider scavengers as backward and a source of shame for “modern” cities. These hostile attitudes lead to repressive policies, punishments, harassment, and attempts at eradication, even to the extent of organized murder: “Approximately 2000 ‘disposable’ individuals have been killed by the end of 1994 as a result of [the] ‘social cleansing’ campaign in Columbia.”⁸

Neglect – In many cases, authorities simply ignore scavengers. They do not take their contribution to waste management into account. In addition, authorities often ignore aspects of sustainable waste management, such as waste reduction, separation, and recycling that are dealt with by informal actors. This lack of recognition or neglect can have quite negative consequences on the lives of individuals in the informal sector. For the informal transport sector, Rouse described how the banning of rickshaw drivers from main roads in Dhaka threatened their activity, yet without solving the city’s transport problems.⁹ Not taking into account the consequences of actions affecting the informal sector is also a form of neglect. In Addis Ababa, a “successful” policy for replacing fuel wood with kerosene, gas and electricity, which are supplied by the formal sector, led to a reduction in the use of fuel wood from 80 percent to 13 percent but also to widespread unemployment among informal suppliers of fuel, including transporters and retailers.¹⁰

Collusion – Collusion is a form of partnership between local authorities and the informal sector, but it is a “criminal partnership.” Political clientelism, corruption, and bribery can flourish between authorities and scavengers, as has happened in Mexico between the ruling party and the *caciques* (the local bosses of scavengers’

cooperatives).¹¹ Scavengers have even been used as musclemen by the party during election campaigns. The term “collusion” suggests that participation or partnership are not necessarily positive.

Stimulation – Stimulation ranges from tolerance (slightly better than neglect) to active integration or partnership. Most researchers and even planners agree that the informal sector is a resource. According to Medina, in some countries, such as Indonesia, China (in particular, Shanghai), Egypt, and Brazil, recognizing the economic, social, and environmental benefits of scavenging and recycling has led governments to change their previously negative attitudes towards scavenging.¹² Scavenger cooperatives receive recognition and financial support (Indonesia), scavengers become more or less integrated into the municipal collection system (Shanghai), and they are provided with infrastructure and municipal services (Cairo, Egypt and Korea). In such cases, one could speak of a form of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) with informal actors. Nevertheless, these examples are still relatively few.

There have been other attempts to categorize the relationships between local authorities and informal actors. For instance, DiGregorio uses the categories of eradication, incorporation, accommodation, and collaboration. By introducing “accommodation,” he brings in a more positive relationship than neglect.¹³ Incorporation and collaboration correspond to Medina’s stimulation concept. DiGregorio’s notion of incorporation includes both instances where the municipality controls and restricts scavenging to delimited areas, as well as cases of near integration of scavengers, where they become “quasi-public servants.” We consider “integration” too strong a word and prefer to use the term “partnerships,” as it introduces more variability and does not necessarily imply a high degree of formality.

Current international models for urban development place great emphasis on public-private partnerships, as a means of capitalizing on the strengths of different actors in the pursuit of common goals.¹⁴ Such models advocate the involvement of, and collaboration with, the private and community sector in order to solve waste management and other problems. And indeed, it has been noted that the informal private sector and community groups are also gradually being seen as partners by municipalities in developing countries.¹⁵ Official recognition of informal service providers may be seen as a means for supporting employment and combating poverty and social inequality. It may also be a means of avoiding public expenditure for services, a strategy currently pursued by many governments in the neoliberal age. Partnerships may also be driven by political agendas and may constitute a way for the state to extend its influence into the informal sector.

Partnerships can exist between private and informal sector operators, as is the case in Bangkok, Thailand, where the latter engage in informal alliances with both public collectors and construction entrepreneurs, behind the back of an inefficient administration.¹⁶ In other kinds of partnership, such as those between a municipality and the private sector, one can observe unintended but quite common consequences. In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, when analyzing public private partnerships, Mkwela showed a “classic” consequence of the collaboration of municipalities with the private sector.¹⁷ Proper services are provided to high status areas where customers are able to pay the required fees for waste collection, while low status areas are more or less left to themselves with an improper waste collection. This is quite a common problem with private sector-municipality partnerships in other countries,

such as those where municipalities are unable or unwilling to properly monitor their partners.¹⁸

This paper examines how the relations between informal actors and the local authorities in the waste sector in Addis Ababa have changed through time. It shows how they have evolved from total neglect towards authoritarian partnerships for waste collection or continuous neglect for recycling. The paper discusses the consequences of and problems involved in this partnership and how it has facilitated political dominance and surveillance. The responses of informal actors are also presented. With “informal activities” we use the following definition: “... unregistered, unregulated or casual activities carried out by individuals and/or family or community enterprises that engage in value-adding activities on a small scale with minimum capital input, using local materials and labor intensive techniques.”¹⁹ Such activities differ from authorized and registered small enterprises—such as the micro and small-scale enterprises which are also referred to in this paper—in that informal activities occur outside existing legal frames. The notion of “informal sector” is problematic and should be viewed as a common-sense notion rather than a concept with analytical value. Among other problems, it is difficult and inadequate to draw a clear separation between a formal and an informal sector given the linkages that often exist between them. Instead, one should think in terms of fuzzy boundaries, the shifting contours of which are a key concern in this paper.

The researchers conducted two to three months of fieldwork and used a range of research methods. They conducted semi-structured open-ended interviews with a wide range of involved actors, including members of private enterprises, NGOs, informal enterprises, government-sponsored enterprises, and administrators at different levels of the city administration (at *kebele*, sub-city and city levels).²⁰ They complemented their sources with their own observations, including observing scavengers at work and recording the frequency of container collection by municipality trucks. Participant observation was practiced when participating in garbage collection with NGOs, in city cleaning campaigns, or events such as the annual Cleaning Day. Whenever possible, the researchers undertook informal discussions with the people involved. The use of secondary literature was somewhat limited due to the scarcity of publications. A quantitative survey of plastics delivery to the largest market place in the city was also conducted.²¹ In her research on plastics recycling, Bjerkli interviewed 63 waste collectors across the city and 150 households in the sub-city of Addis Ketema (*kebeles* 6, 13 and 15). She also conducted interviews with two owners of plastics factories, five municipality employees in charge of solid waste management and the staff of two relevant NGOs: ENDA Ethiopia and GTZ. Zelalem interviewed both formal and informal actors, as well as operators in government-induced micro and small-scale Enterprises (a total of 23 interviews). He also carried out interviews with a few households and with the relevant officials at several administrative levels.²² Yirgalem interviewed forty scavengers operating at the Repi landfill site, as well as employees in small-scale informal industries located in proximity to the landfill site.²³

The next section describes the solid waste situation in Addis Ababa and discusses the important role of the informal sector. The different categories of informal actors conducting waste-related activities are presented, followed by a discussion of the relations between them and the local government prior to 2003 and also the ways in which informal actors attempt to avoid the authorities. The paper then analyses the change in governmental strategy towards the informal waste sector between 2003 and 2005, the official justifications, and the hidden

agendas behind its intervention, as well as the outcomes and responses of informal actors to it. The paper ends with a summary of the findings and concluding remarks.

The informalizing waste sector: neglect, distrust, and avoidance

Addis Ababa is a fast growing city with a population of over three million. Among other problems associated with rapid urbanization, the management of solid waste poses a serious challenge. The management approaches and techniques employed by the municipality of Addis Ababa to manage solid waste have been largely inadequate. Compared to other sectors, solid waste management has been given too little attention in terms of resource allocation and establishing effective institutional arrangements. It has been estimated that geographical coverage and frequency of disposal by the public collection system has been by far below the existing needs, ranging between 40–70 percent of the total generated waste.²⁴ Thus, a considerable portion of the city and its population is not adequately serviced by the public collection system. In addition, the city is still awaiting the establishment of new and properly built sanitary dumping sites. The current system for waste disposal is unsafe, with high social and environmental costs. The existing solid waste disposal site, the Repi landfill site, is an open landfill site, devoid of any infrastructure. The Repi landfill site does not meet the necessary criteria, not least in terms of minimum buffer distances required for safe waste disposal, between the site and other land use activities, such as settlements, schools and recreation. Communities settled around the landfill are exposed to great health risks due to the high levels of environmental contamination, including ground and surface water contamination.

Informal actors play a critical role in the solid waste sector in Addis Ababa. Activities related to the sector are a source of income for many urban poor. Such activities include waste picking and door-to-door collection, recycling, composting, and reprocessing. The sub-studies conducted on activities at the landfill site and within the plastic waste sub-sector revealed that diverse actors are involved.²⁵ Interviews carried out with a variety of actors involved in these activities make it possible to identify some of the key actors and the relations between them.

Foragers collect materials from municipal containers and from the streets while scavengers collect items at the municipal landfill site. It is estimated that the Repi landfill site supports up to 500 on-site scavengers, including both temporary and permanent ones.²⁶ On the basis of the interviews conducted with individuals in this group, it can be stated that permanent scavengers are mainly young people from the nearby settlements. They are organized into gangs which control the resources collected on the site and whose power is based on seniority and local residency. Newcomers are forced to pay a certain amount of cash or share the collected items with local bullies. Scavengers then sell the recovered items for reuse or deliver the materials to small-scale industry owners and farmers with whom they have arrangements. Some municipal employees are also involved in scavenging.

The *qorales*—the local term for small-scale unregistered waste collectors—collect or buy items such as plastic materials, tin cans, bottles, scrap metal, and paper directly from the households and to a limited extent from the foragers and small-scale enterprises.²⁷ They deliver these items to the traders, locally called “wholesalers,” operating at Merkato, the largest market place in Addis Ababa. These wholesalers do not comply with governmental regulations, such as those relating to the payment of taxes. *Qorales* and wholesalers are linked through tightly drawn networks based on ethnic affinities, as both groups tend to

identify themselves as belonging to the Gurage ethnic group. Considerable differences in the income levels were found between the various categories of operators described above, with wholesalers being definitely better off and in an advantaged position in relation to the other groups.²⁸

The above operators are vertically linked, directly or indirectly, to the local recycling industry. Firstly, close to the landfill site, there is a small-scale industry which re-processes waste from the tanneries and carcasses to produce glue, locally called *colla*. There are two private “clandestine” *colla* producers in the area, each with approximately five employees. Five of them were interviewed informally by Yirgalem. The *colla* producers buy carcasses from on-site scavengers and/or gather the waste that tannery factories dump at the landfill site. Secondly, in the plastics sector, wholesalers supply the materials directly to factories located in Addis Ababa.²⁹ Solid waste collection is also performed by a few private registered enterprises and NGOs, whose role is relatively limited.

The informal system for the collection, trade and transformation of plastic and other waste materials appears to be highly organized. The informal plastics recovery system is particularly efficient, in that an estimated high volume of plastic materials (23 tons) is informally collected on a daily basis in the city and recycled.³⁰ This is related to the high local demand for plastic products manufactured from plastic waste, which in turn is related to the low purchasing power of a large part of the urban population. With regard to recycling in of plastics, as of other materials, the municipality has never developed any systematic efforts. Hence, recycling activities are mainly carried out by informal operators.

Despite the important role of informal operators in the handling of solid waste in Addis Ababa, the dominant attitude of the authorities was, until the early 2000s, one of disregard. Although the existence of informal operators in the sector was acknowledged at different levels of the city administration, their significant contribution to waste reduction, reuse and recycling was either unrecognized or ignored. No sound policy or incentives were directed at supporting and developing their activities, nor were there any attempts to integrate them into the formal waste management system.

Informal operators, on the other hand, tried to avoid any contact with the city officials, opting to operate clandestinely due to lack of trust and confidence in the authorities. For example, the small-scale *colla* producers by the landfill site occupy rather inaccessible and hidden locations, mainly to avoid being discovered by government officials.³¹ The business owners try to avoid any discussion with unfamiliar persons regarding *colla* production and hide from outsiders, instructing their employees not to talk about their activities. Any stranger coming to the site is perceived either as a potential business competitor or as a government agent who is seeking to enforce legal measures against their activities.³² Among the major reasons for these informal operators to work clandestinely are fear of eviction from their location and of unfair, unaffordable taxes.³³

In the plastics recovery system, similar secrecy and distrust were found on the basis of interviews with the various kinds of actors involved.³⁴ During fieldwork, Bjerkli found it very hard to talk to people operating in the informal recovery system and obtain information about their activities. Outsiders to the system are not trusted; only those having social relations with others within the system and knowing the rules and norms operating within it can be trusted. For example, it was almost impossible to find out which factories the “wholesalers” sold their plastics to and from whom the factories bought their plastic waste. During interviews, it surfaced that a major reason for this secrecy was that those involved feared that the government would find out about their “illegal” activities. They perceived

that this would result in increased taxes or even in the closing down of their businesses. Their lack of confidence in the government also stemmed from the fact that the authorities do not recognize their contribution and make decisions without consulting the people concerned. Respondents feared that the government would make decisions that would force them out of business. For example, at the time of fieldwork, the government had plans to relocate Menalish Terra (the area within Merkato market where “wholesalers” operate) to a site located far away on the periphery of the city. Since the informal operators could not count on any governmental support and were not consulted about decisions affecting them, many of them felt that they were better off without the government’s involvement. A new strategy by the municipality to introduce micro and small-scale enterprises (MSSEs) into the sector would only deepen these feelings and make informal actors wary of the government’s intentions, as will be further discussed below.

A tentative partnership between the municipality and the informal operators

In the early 2000s, there were increasing concerns about the image of Addis Ababa. When visiting the city, President Khadafi stated that Addis Ababa was too dirty to be the headquarters of the newly created African Union. This and other pressures apparently had an impact on the city administration. The strategy of the municipal government to tackle the waste problem took an important turn in 2003, when a provisional city government and a new mayor, Arkebe Oqubay, were appointed.

Prior to 2003, the municipality placed small containers in particular locations for waste collection at the housing block level. The municipal trucks emptied the containers irregularly and transported the waste to the Repi landfill. The collection of waste from the households to the containers was either done directly by the households themselves or by informal collectors paid by the households. This system was based on informal and oral arrangements between the informal waste collectors and the municipality. Having formerly ignored the role of informal waste collectors, the city authorities in 2003 initially appeared interested in recognizing and facilitating their work. Government officials apparently recognized that informal waste collectors were capable of collecting more waste than the municipal trucks operators. They realized that they could reduce the cost of waste collection by leaving the door-to-door collection to the informal waste collectors (i.e. the pre-collection stage). The city government withdrew from waste collection at the housing block level practiced earlier by the municipal truck fleets, as reported by Zelalem.³⁵ It restricted its operations to the transportation of waste from fewer and bigger containers that were placed at readily accessible locations. Informal waste collectors started to organize themselves into small-scale informal enterprises and were to some extent recognized or supported by the municipality.

In a second phase a few months later, however, the new city administration gradually developed an interest in fully controlling the pre-collection component of solid waste management. By the end of 2003, it started to advocate the need for further formalizing the pre-existing informal solid waste collecting enterprises. The government intervened in the sector by institutionalizing it and introducing new actors in the form of micro and small-scale enterprises (MSSEs). These enterprises were organized under an agency, the Micro and Small-Scale Enterprises Development Agency (MSSEDA), with offices at all levels of the city administration (city, sub-city, and *kebele*). According to Zelalem, this intervention was made without any kind of preliminary consultation and consensus with the pre-existing actors. The newly introduced actors, whose members were selected from among the unemployed by

the local authorities, therefore appeared as rivals to the pre-existing informal enterprises (and even to established formal private waste enterprises). Semi-structured interviews conducted by Zelalem with pre-existing formal private and informal actors, with the new MSSEs, and with *kebele*, sub-city, and city officials, elicited insights into this intervention and the responses to it.³⁶

The *kebele* authorities, played an important role in implementing the new strategy. Experiences varied across different *kebeles* in the city. The MSSEDA officials operating at *kebele* and sub-city levels adopted three different approaches. The first approach was to dispossess and evict the pre-existing solid waste collection enterprises from their service areas. Secondly, government officials adopted another mechanism by which the pre-existing enterprises were forced to be reorganized under the umbrella of MSSEDA, which in turn meant denying their rights and interests in organizing themselves as independent enterprises. In some cases the pre-existing enterprises were forced to merge with the newly organized MSSEs. Thirdly, in other cases the government officials avoided conflicts and evictions by deliberately organizing and deploying the MSSEs only in areas that were not served by any other enterprise.

The authorities employed various overt and covert means of intervention in areas where pre-existing enterprises were to be evicted. According to informants from private formal and informal enterprises, one of the overt interventions involved issuing official letters signed and stamped by *kebele* authorities and distributed to each household. The letters gave the impression that the MSSEs were the only legitimate enterprises and urged the households to terminate their contract with the former collectors and to enter into a new contract with the newly institutionalized MSSEs. This led to a systematic eviction of pre-existing enterprises from their established service areas. In other cases, the pre-existing enterprises were directly ordered to leave part or the whole of their service area for the newly established MSSEs. Due to such harsh interventions by the *kebele* officials, even the private formal enterprises were expelled from their service areas in favor of government-sponsored MSSEs. Similarly, the informal operators were offered few alternatives: at best, to share part of their service area with the MSSEs, or, in the worst case, to leave.³⁷ Another form of intervention used by the government officials to capture clients from pre-existing enterprises was to reduce the service charges to a lower level than those set by the pre-existing enterprises. According to Zelalem, the *kebele* officials along with the MSSEs promised to deliver their service at lower fees, often below a workable minimum price.

The pre-existing solid waste collectors, particularly the informal ones, responded in different ways to the newly introduced government-sponsored MSSEs, as revealed by interviews with formal and informal operators. They increased the frequency of collection, reduced collection fees, and rendered free supplementary services to improve their competitiveness.³⁸ They used informal networks to gather information, discuss current developments, and strategize how to react to government interventions. Most importantly, almost all of the interviewed pre-existing solid waste collectors, formal and informal, were strongly negative towards the newly integrated MSSEs. Hence, conflicts and hostilities developed as the dominant kinds of relationships between government-sponsored MSSEs and other formal or informal operators. Conflicts became sometimes serious and triggered clashes. One of the interviewed informal operators told how one man was killed in such a fight. There were also instances where in order to be heard the pre-existing actors used conflicts as a strategy to attract the attention of the *kebele* authorities and other government officials.

Justifications and outcomes of governmental intervention

From the interviews with officials at city and sub-city level it became apparent that the city government justified the need for the above-mentioned interventions in solid waste collection on the basis of two objectives. One objective was to ensure a more efficient and cost-effective solid waste collection by discouraging the more random waste collection activities carried out by the informal sector. The second objective was to generate employment opportunities in the sector through sponsoring MSSEs. These stated objectives were far from achieved and the intervention appeared to be more of a political exercise. The intervention was instrumental in recruiting new party members and ensuring political dominance and local surveillance. In this regard, Bjerkli underlined that the city administration of Addis Ababa was “highly politicized.”³⁹ Consequently, the result of the interventions was almost entirely to marginalize the pre-existing solid waste collecting enterprises and to disrupt the existing system, even though it was thriving in terms of both the volume of waste collected and the service catchment areas. Some areas were left without any door-to-door collection. Garbage piled up in the streets and along the streams of Addis Ababa. The number of illegal dump sites also increased.

The integration of MSSEs into the pre-existing solid waste collection system has contributed to the emergence of three predominant patterns of change in different city areas. The first is that the MSSEs have expanded at the expense of pre-existing informal and formal enterprises, as the latter were displaced or absorbed into the MSSEs. The second pattern is that both pre-existing and newly integrated actors have been functioning together in the same area with little conflict. A third pattern indicates that the pre-existing actors are on the recovery and reconquering collection areas as most of the MSSEs were dissolved shortly after they were established, as discussed below.

From the interviews, it became clear that the MSSEs faced serious challenges and intense conflicts involving the pre-existing informal and private formal actors. The informal and private enterprises were forced to spend their time, resources, and efforts engaging in a series of conflicts rather than focusing on their actual work. Moreover, the levels of income in both informal enterprises and MSSEs – that is, of the individuals engaged in waste collection across all enterprises – appear not to have increased to a reasonable level. Rather, judging from the interviews it seems that incomes have deteriorated further, mainly due to the prevailing “unhealthy competition” implemented simply for the sake of pushing some enterprises out of business. Most of the enterprises, and particularly those organized under MSSEs, had become weaker in terms of finances, material capacity, and employment stability.

The MSSEs were introduced mainly by the entrenched interests of the *kebele* authorities. Each *kebele* had its own target quota and officials were responsible and accountable for ensuring the realization of the intended targets. Their aim was to establish as many enterprises as possible so as to appear as loyal champions in implementing the city government’s program for creating “new employment.” To this end, putting pre-existing enterprises out of operation by offering lower service fees resulted in reducing employment in the pre-existing informal sector. It was a belief held among the interviewed officials that more than 10,000 new job opportunities were created in solid waste collection, but this seems far from having been achieved. In real terms, what the city government did was to institutionalize new enterprises under its auspices while simultaneously evicting the pre-existing actors. It created “new job opportunities” for those organized under the MSSEs,

while individuals working in the informal enterprises lost their jobs. This can only be described as “fake employment creation.”

Imbalances developed in the spatial distribution of enterprises operating across different *kebeles*, as some *kebeles* were oversupplied with solid waste collection enterprises, while others suffered from inadequacies in waste collection. MSSEs were mainly deployed in areas that were already served by the pre-existing enterprises, further contributing to the geographical imbalance in coverage. According to the interviews, MSSEs usually failed to sustain service delivery at the newly introduced collection rates and often dissolved after a short period of operation. This appeared to provide an opportunity for pre-existing informal actors to re-conquer their spaces of operation. But, the earlier slushing of fees by the MSSEs has complicated the situation, as households may refuse to accept newly adjusted collection fees.

Caricatures of partnerships and unresolved problems

The authors’ studies of the waste sector in Addis Ababa have shown varied and shifting relationships between the municipal authorities and small-scale operators in the sector. The attitudes of the local authorities towards small-scale operators have ranged from total neglect to authoritarian forms of partnerships that could be characterized as a form of control. The latter kind of relations are absent from DiGregorio’s and Medina’s categorization of relationships between informal actors and the state presented earlier in this article. These forms of control, however, should thus be included as a separate category within such categorizations.

Barriers or resistance to institutionalized relations have been expressed by both governmental actors and informal operators. In the studied setting, the nature of these relationships has reached the stage where, for the most part, informal operators (particularly in recycling) try to avoid any contact with the municipality. The local government is perceived as only interested in trying to impose new or increased taxes on people. In plastics recycling, the activities are run completely by informal actors and carried out totally outside the control of the municipality, which is unaware of and unconcerned about recycling. Many municipal employees were not aware of the magnitude or even existence of the activity.⁴⁰ Informal actors have also shown a remarkable level of agency. They have demonstrated an ability to negotiate, a flexibility to adapt to changes, and willingness when necessary to fight for their interests. This was evidently the case when informal collectors had to cope with the threat posed to their activities by the introduction of MSSEs.

The period 2003–2006 under Mayor Arkebe represented a new trend, as for the first time there was an attempt to support and collaborate with groups in the informal sector, which had traditionally been ignored by the authorities. This support was, however, short-lived as the local government soon proceeded to support competing actors, i.e. authorized small enterprises in the sector. This marginalized and threatened the livelihoods of pre-existing local scavengers and waste collectors and disrupted the informal waste collection system.⁴¹ The authorities employed authoritarian methods in order to impose their own political agenda, one driven by social control and opportunities for clientelism. The whole process was dictated by political motives of merely boosting employment figures and aimed at extending local political control. This finding is in accordance with what Bjerkli mentioned as the presence of a “highly politicized” government structure which was dominated by a high degree of upward accountability. The findings show that the authoritarian top-down

approach failed because it did not consider existing informal operators in the sector as possible partners. In planning and implementing development projects it is vital to understand and appreciate the existing service delivery mechanisms by informal entrepreneurs and seek ways of working with, rather than against, existing individuals, businesses, and structures.⁴² Ignoring and even undermining the existing informal system, and creating a clientele among another group of unemployed which was supposed to replace the former operators, can thus be described as a caricature of a partnership.

Undoubtedly, problems of competence and capacity in the local government have also hindered appropriate responses to the waste challenge. Among many problems, there is a high turnover of staff in charge of waste management due to politicization and frequent reforms of the administrative structures. Government officials have poor knowledge of the real situation of the informal solid waste sector and the resources for conducting studies on the sector may be lacking. While the difficulties faced by the local administration are important, however, the problem cannot be reduced to one of lack of competence, or lack of the appropriate technology, or of the “right” organizational set-up. The political and governance context is far more important. The outcomes of particular attempts at establishing collaboration with informal actors depend to a great extent on the nature of relationships between the state and/or local administration and other actors in particular contexts. In a way, what we have shown is a municipality temporarily adopting a strategy of collaboration and partnership with informal actors, in accordance with the calls of both donor agencies and some scholars, yet doing it within the framework of an authoritarian political culture that has dominated the history of Ethiopian administration. It is therefore doomed to fail.

According to UN-HABITAT, good governance involves the adoption of an “enabling approach” that allows all actors to be involved in all matters and decisions that affect their activity.⁴³ In contrast, as Onibokun remarks, in a number of African countries, “lack of good governance is at the root of most of their urban problems, particularly in waste management.”⁴⁴ In his view, “Both central and local governments lack democracy, transparency, accountability and cooperation with the public in their operations and processes and in their relationships with civil society.”⁴⁵ Others have also pointed to the central importance of the issue of governance in relation to service provision.⁴⁶

In the study setting, the authoritarian methods and the hidden agenda of the local authorities deepened the general mistrust of informal actors. The only realistic possibility for collaboration requires democratic accountability and participatory governance, more precisely a genuine recognition of informal actors and willingness to involve all actors in decision-making. In addition, it requires the provision of support in the form of access to credit, vocational training, and the provision of equipment and social and health services. Only then will informal actors trust the government and achieve some form of “social contract.” Participative governance also requires the strengthening of collective organizations among informal operators in order to facilitate collective representation of their interests when negotiating with other partners.

Notes

1. Demeke (2002) reported that according to the survey conducted by the CSA (the office of statistics in Ethiopia) up to 80 percent of the population in Addis Ababa was engaged in some form of informal income earning activity in 1997.
2. See for example Aagesen's study of Bangkok (2000), Medina (1997) on Cairo, and Bjerkli (2005) on Addis Ababa.
3. Naas and Rivke, 2004.
4. For example, Naas and Rivke (2004); Rouse (2004) as well as Asmamaw (2003), for Ethiopia.
5. Rouse, 2004, p. 9.
6. See for example, Azam and Mansoor, 2004.
7. For example, in Ethiopia, informal waste operators did not qualify for the Small Scale Income Generating Scheme which was intended to provide micro-credit facilities and training for poor urban dwellers (Demeke, 2002).
8. Medina, 1997, p. 14.
9. Rouse, 2004.
10. Rouse, 2004.
11. Medina, 1997.
12. Medina, 1997, pp. 16–17.
13. DiGregorio, 1994.
14. Azam and Mansoor, 2004, p. 471.
15. Van de Klundert and Lardinois, 1995, p. 16.
16. Aagesen, 2000.
17. Mkwela, 2001.
18. See for example Mugagga (2006) on Uganda.
19. Van de Klundert and Lardinois, 1995, p. 10.
20. The lowest administrative unit in Ethiopia.
21. Bjerkli, 2005.
22. Zelalem, 2006.
23. Yirgalem, 2001.
24. Yirgalem, 2001.
25. Yirgalem, 2001; Bjerkli, 2005.
26. Yirgalem, 2001.
27. The term *qorale* is the short form of the Amharic '*Korkoro yaleh*' (Have you any scrap metal?), which is what the young boys shout when out collecting.
28. The incomes of wholesalers were sometimes as high as 85 USD per day (Bjerkli, 2005).
29. Bjerkli, 2005.
30. Bjerkli, 2005.
31. Yirgalem, 2001.
32. Yirgalem, 2001.
33. Yirgalem, 2001.
34. Bjerkli, 2005.
35. Zelalem, 2006.
36. Zelalem, 2006.

37. Zelalem, 2006, p. 78
38. Zelalem, 2006.
39. Bjerkli, 2005, p. 89.
40. Bjerkli, 2005.
41. Zelalem, 2006.
42. Post et al., 2003.
43. UN-HABITAT, 2002, p. 8.
44. Onibokum, 1999b, p. 240.
45. Onibokum, 1999a, p. 231.
46. Nunan and Sattertwate, 2001.

References

Aagesen, Tine. "Fra avfall til ressurs. En analyse av relasjonene mellom den formelle og den uformelle sektor i avfallsbehandling i Tha Kloong i Bangkok, Thailand." Hovedfagsoppgave, NTNU, 2002.

Azam, Ahmed Shafiul and Ali Mansoor. "Partnerships for Solid Waste Management in Developing Countries: Linking Theories to Realities." *Habitat International* 28 (2004), pp. 467–79.

Asmamaw, Enquobahrie. "Controversies Underlying Informal Sector Operation in Ethiopia." Paper presented at the PF International Conference on Contemporary Development Issues in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 11–13 July 2003.

Bjerkli, Camilla. "The Cycle of Plastic Waste: An Analysis of the Informal Plastic Recovery System in Addis Ababa." Master's thesis, NTNU, 2005.

Demeke, Worku. "Interventions in Strengthening the Informal Sector: The Case of Small Scale Income Generating Scheme in Addis Ababa." Master's thesis, NTNU, 2002.

DiGregorio, Michael R. *Urban Harvest: Recycling as a Peasant Industry in Northern Vietnam*. Honolulu: East West Center Occasional Papers, Environment Series, 1994.

Medina, Martin. *Informal Recycling and Collection of Solid Wastes in Developing Countries: Issues and Opportunities*. Tokyo: The United Nations University/Institute of Advanced Studies, Working Paper No. 24, 1997.

Mkwela, Hawa. "Investigation on the Role of Urban Agriculture in Solid Waste Management: The Case of Kinondoni Municipality of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania." Master's thesis, Department of Geography, NTNU, 2001.

Mugagga, Frank. "The Public-Private Sector approaches to Municipal Solid Waste Management. How Does it Work in Makindye Division, Kampala District, Uganda." Master's thesis, NTNU, 2006.

Naas, Peter J.M. and Jaffe Rivke. "Informal Waste Management. Shifting the Focus from Problem to Potential." *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 6 (2004), pp. 337–53.

Nunan, Fiona and David Sattertwate. "The Influence of Governance on the Provision of Urban Environmental Infrastructure and Services for Low Income Groups." *International Planning Studies* 6, no. 4 (2004), pp. 409–26.

Onibokun, Adepoju G. (ed.) *Managing the Monster. Urban Waste and Governance in Africa*. Ottawa: IDRC, 1999a.

Onibokun, A.G. "Synthesis and Recommendations." In *Managing the Monster. Urban Waste and Governance in Africa*, ed. Onibokun, A.G. (Ottawa: IDRC, 1999b), pp. 227–252.

Post, Johan, Broekema, J. and N. Obirih-Opareh. "Trial and Error in Privatization: Experiences in Urban Solid Waste Collection in Accra (Ghana) and Hyderabad (India)." *Urban Studies* 40, no. 4 (2003), pp. 835–852.

Rouse, Jonathan. "Absorbing Informal-sector Entrepreneurs into Improved Urban Services." *Small Enterprise Development. An International Journal of Micro-Finance and Business Development* 15 (2004).

UN-HABITAT, *The Global Campaign on Urban Governance*. (2nd ed.) Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Program, 2002.

Van de Klundert, Arnold and Lardinois, Inge. "Community and Private (Formal and Informal) Sector Management in Municipal Solid Waste Management in Developing Countries." Paper presented at the UMP Workshop, Ittingen, Holland, 1995.

Yirgalem, Mahiteme. "Land Use Conflict and Impact Assessment of Repi landfill Site in Addis Ababa." Master's thesis, NTNU, 2001.

Zelalem, Fenta. "Controlling the Informal Sector: Solid Waste Collection and the Addis Ababa City Administration 2003-2005." Master's thesis, NTNU, 2006.