10 Accra's unregulated market-oriented sanitation strategy

Problems and opportunity

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The larger study from which this chapter is drawn was commissioned by Waste Enterprisers and sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Its original purpose was to investigate 'public toilet' sites in Accra, Ghana, articulating the maintenance and management practices of site operators in order to identify sanitation delivery challenges and potential strategies for future interventions aimed at expanding sanitation access in Accra. One of the assumptions tested was that toilet operators will forgo important maintenance tasks because of the cost, and that those decisions will directly impact on the availability of sanitation in the city. This fear was supported by the literature. When cost structure, management, lack of public participation or the socio-political context of toilet provision results in inadequate maintenance of sanitation facilities, serious problems emerge in community health, environmental degradation and constrained sanitation access (Burra 2003; Nance and Ortolano 2007; Schouten and Mathenge 2010).

In this chapter I attempt to diverge from the original purpose of the data collection. Here, the goal is to use the data to express how the everyday urban service provision arrangements in Accra and cities like it are far more messy and untidy things than the taming narratives of the privatization and critical frameworks would suggest. This way, the chapter speaks to overarching themes in this larger volume because it seeks to inform action through a nuanced understanding of complex dynamics, situating praxis between totalizing narratives on the one hand and the mundane realities of people's lives on the other. Accra is a context where an overall scheme of privatized service provision masks a diverse and contested everyday reality. The data provide an important case of market-oriented and unregulated sanitation schemes which both have problematic outcomes, and suggest space for improving access to sanitation and our conceptual approach to socio-ecological problem-solving.

Accra, the capital of Ghana and the country's largest city, has long struggled with sanitation. As Awortwi (2006) reports, by the mid-1980s approximately 60 per cent of the population relied on public toilets for their daily needs. These were large communal toilet blocks managed by local government. The facilities poorly served the city's population, which was effectively 'engulfed in filth' (2006: 227).

There are many reasons for this. The plight of the urban poor regarding water and sanitation cannot be disentangled from larger urbanization forces that resulted in widespread inequalities regarding land and other resources. The urbanization

process in Accra has largely benefited colonial and post-colonial elites as a result of the manipulation of communal land institutions in urban and rural areas (Obeng-Odoom 2013). This contributed to poor rural migrants inhabiting increasingly dense urban neighbourhoods with insecure tenure. These communities were also largely neglected in terms of infrastructure investment and provision of urban services (Owusu 2010). Significant levels of ethnic segregation, particularly along socio-economic lines, exacerbated the underprovision of services (Owusu and Agyei-Mensah 2011). These factors all contributed to low levels of in-home sanitation and high reliance on public toilet facilities. The facilities were badly managed, staff were poorly paid or not paid, and users were unwilling to pay for bad services. All of these problems were made worse by public sector reforms that laid off staff at the sites in 1986 (Awortwi 2006).

In the 1990s a series of reforms introduced significant private sector involvement in the water and sanitation sectors in Ghana (Yeboah 2006; Awortwi 2006). By 2006, it was estimated that there were at least 90 small private contractors operating public toilets in Accra. These are loosely regulated enterprises operating toilet sites under several types of institutional arrangement with the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA). While there has been some improvement in the sanitation sector relative to conditions prevalent in the 1980s, Accra continues to struggle. According to the *National Environmental Sanitation Strategy Action Plan 2010–2015* (Government of Ghana 2010), 39 per cent of Ghana's urban citizens depend on public toilets for their daily sanitation needs, and in the case of Accra, waste collected from public toilets is discharged into the ocean without treatment. Further, 11.5 per cent of Accra's population resort to open defecation. Fee-for-use management is ubiquitous, and one estimate suggests that in Ghana's urban population, toilet user fees could constitute as much as 10–15 per cent of a household's income for low wage earners (Korboe *et al*. 1999).[1]

As discussed above, this study was designed to evaluate management practices of public toilet sites operated by private enterprises. Forty-one public toilet owners or managers were interviewed in November and December 2012. Each respondent was asked to explain the day-to-day management of their toilet site. These included questions related to the following:

- maintenance tasks required to operate public toilet sites
- basic system technology and requirements
- the basic cost structure of the site
- public toilet strategies enlarging the customer base
- the relationship between individual sites, other public toilets and local government
- any challenges or bottlenecks experienced while providing the service.

Public toilet sites from 6 of the 11 submetro administrative units of Accra were included in the sample in order to vary the socio-economic status of catchment areas, keeping a primary focus on lower-income parts of the city. Site selection relied on the 'Slum Index' information created by San Diego State University for the Greater Accra region (Jankowska *et al*. 2012). The neighbourhoods were as follows:

- Jamestown, Asheidu Keteke Submetro, a lower-income area in one of the oldest parts of Accra
- Nima, Ayawaso East Submetro, a low-income neighbourhood that is highly contested by political parties
- Old Fadama, Ablekuma Central Submetro, a high-density neighbourhood where nearly all the residents have insecure tenure, and some of the worst socio-economic conditions in Accra are found
- Kaneshi, Okai Koi South Submetro, a neighbourhood in the vicinity of the Kaneshi Market, one of the largest public markets in West Africa, which is middle income, but with a significant presence of public toilets
- Alajo, Ayawaso Central Submetro, another moderate-income area with pockets of lower-income households and a significant presence of public toilets
- Osu, Osu Klottery Submetro: a mixed-income area containing high-income households including foreign expatriates and non-governmental organization (NGO) headquarters as well as many low-income households.

Figure 10.1 Submetro areas of Accra, Ghana.

Key informant interviews were also carried out with the following:

- the programme manager for a water, sanitation and health NGO operating in Accra
- the head environmental engineer for the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA)
- a resident of Old Fadama and employee of the Ghana Federation of the Urban Poor
- the chair of a septic truck drivers' union
- a long-serving septic truck driver
- the secretary of the Alajo Development Committee
- the secretary of the Jamestown Public Toilet Owners Association
- a long-time resident and community leader in Nima.

Over the last several decades the question of who should provide urban services and infrastructure has been deeply explored. Mainstream development organizations (see e.g. World Bank 1993) increasingly argued that uncompetitive public monopolies were largely inadequate for the task of urban service provision, and asserted that if the government was the problem in infrastructure provision and service provision, then the answer was to cut the government out of the process. This belief was coupled with the assumption that the forms of centralized provision of urban services found in the developed world should be replicated as the only truly appropriate way to provide adequate services (Jaglin 2014). This neoliberal approach, particularly as applied to the water and sanitation sectors in the developing world, was widely utilized in urban development projects. This approach restructured and privatized service provision wherever possible, and brought a market logic to systems that were to remain publicly controlled.

This effort was significantly criticized for reasons involving access, quality and price (Zaki and Amin 2009). Other criticisms included the sequencing of implementation, the perceived abandonment of public utilities rather than attempts to provide more resources, and the condemnation of private provision on the ideological grounds that access to water and sanitation is a human right and such services should never be commoditized (Prasad 2006). Populations in the developing world resented higher charges for still largely inadequate services under privatized systems; considered much reform a veiled grab of power and profit (Mustafa and Reeder 2009); and found that the poor were still largely underserved, and that in some instances inequalities increased under reformist regimes (Castro 2007). The 'pro-poor sanitation' literature emerged as largely aimed at expanding the economic and social benefits of urban services through either more appropriate pro-poor technologies for sanitation, calling for urban governance changes that result in governments at multiple scales that are more responsive to the urban poor, or both (Nunan and Satterthwaite 2001; Cross and Morel 2005; Gutiérrez 2007; Paterson, Mara and Curtis 2007).

Many of these factors and others were included in a general reconsideration of certain liberalization policies (Rodrik 2006), with two divergent presumptions emerging about the role of private actors in the production of urban services:[2] either the push for privatization of urban services has run its course and we can expect increasing public control moving forward (Bel and Warner 2008; Prasad 2006) or there is a place for privatization in expanding the economic and social benefits of urban services, but privatization in its various manifestations can only be positive when deeply rooted in contextual appreciation and targeted in more specific and effective ways.

One of the problems with both the mainstream and critical scholarship cited above is that the narratives are often limited to large-scale monopolistic public, private or public–private partnership operations. In reality, many urban regions are served through 'other' private sector operators (Solo 1999). These are small private enterprises offering water, sanitation and other services for a fee. These enterprises are quite varied in type and quality, and are loosely regulated (Chenoweth 2004). These services are understood to be 'co-produced' by multiple agents in an attempt to meet the everyday needs of people in specific circumstances (Allen *et al*. 2008; Olivier de Sardan 2010). There is a growing realization that these types of decentralized approaches to sanitation have much to offer because of low comparable cost, flexible technologies, adaptability to varying physical and social constraints, and ease in facilitating wastewater reuse and recovery (Libralato *et al*. 2012). But because these systems are produced in local contexts impacted by specific technical, social and institutional realties, they defy easy categorization or generalization. As a result the neoliberal and critical taming narratives of water and sanitation are too often imposed from the outside and fail to connect to the reality of people's lives.

As Jaglin (2014) suggests, these other providers are the real way urban services are provided in many cities, and their diversity, vitality and innovativeness are too often missing from dialogue on urban services and the poor. Jaglin suggests that in every city there exist varied socio-technical 'dispositifs', or interactions between actors, technologies and institutions that co-produce service delivery configurations. This is also suggestive of Bourdieu's (1977) *habitus*, the understanding that the everyday norms that shape how citizens meet their daily needs are created in the interplay between social structures and individual agency. In a sense, this is the root of the untamed everyday of water and sanitation provision. In places like Accra, global debates about the role of governments and markets in the sector ebb and flow, but citizens as both 'other' providers and users of urban services bend systems to meet their own needs in ways that belie the prescriptions of the larger narratives.

In the context of Accra, the everyday reality of service provision maintains a market-oriented logic with little or no regulation. In Accra, 'public toilet' is a misnomer because public toilets are privately managed, or privately produced and managed. Services are provided in two ways. Every public toilet is either an 'AMA' toilet or a 'private toilet'. Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) toilets,

representing 41 per cent (N=17) of the sample, are toilets that were once run directly by local government, but have gone through a privatization process or which have been constructed since privatization. Awortwi (2006) established that there are several institutional arrangements for the operation of these toilets, including *affermage*, where all operation and maintenance is handed to a private entity for a period of time; *rehabilitate, operate and transfer (ROT)*, where a private enterprise is 'given' a defunct toilet to rehabilitate and operate for a time; *build, operate and transfer (BOT)*, where a private enterprise is allowed to build and operate a toilet until such time as the AMA takes it back; and *build, own and operate (BOO)*, where private enterprises are permitted to build and operate a toilet with payment obligations to the AMA.

Private toilets, representing 59 per cent (N=24) of the sample, are public toilet sites on privately controlled land. While the AMA still regulates these and collects revenues from their operation in the same manner as for AMA toilets, no contractual obligations exist between the AMA and the owner. While it is likely that it is the formal responsibility of the AMA to issue permits to all new and existing public toilets, this study finds no evidence that this is done systematically. Instead, the process described by respondents is that private toilets appear as the market demands them and entrepreneurs rise to meet that demand. After a private toilet site is established, the AMA will begin to collect revenue and provide an element of regulatory oversight.

In terms of regulation, the AMA submetro administrators frequently gather toilet owners together ostensibly to collect fees or to provide some kind of common use information about operating a toilet site. However, in some submetros, these meetings are expanded to include information on resource-sharing, problem-solving and other types of organizing.

The goal of the analysis that follows is to examine how the 'other' private sector operators in Accra function in an overtly market-oriented, unregulated way, showing this situation to be problematic for a number of reasons, but also using the case as an example of how large-scale taming narratives fail to grasp the everyday reality of the city, and how even in overtly problematic situations there is room to dig deeper into the everyday to find productive avenues forward. The three sections that follow discuss, first, how the unregulated market-oriented strategy opens space for the co-opting of sanitation services for political purposes to the detriment of urban citizens; second, how the unregulated market strategy tends to create conditions of too much competition between sanitation providers; and third, how a better understanding of the everyday provision of sanitation opens possibilities for socio-ecological problem-solving that can increase access to sanitation in Accra.

Unregulated markets and political co-option

All public toilets, both AMA and private locations, are managed at the submetro level as described above. For AMA locations, the contract between the local

government and the owner is held at the submetro level. All decisions on granting or resending management contracts are made by submetro administrators. The process is quite political. Public toilets can be a good source of income, and contracts are often given as political patronage. It has long been the practice to hand over public toilets as the spoils of victory to political party 'footsoldiers' (Ayee and Crook 2003; Bob-Milliar 2012). If a contract holder is in the wrong party or someone else is owed a political favour, they might no longer be able to keep control of an AMA toilet. However, toilet sites are quite contested, and some are able to maintain control in the face of political change. For instance, Respondent FA, a long-time toilet manager in Alajo, described his experience as follows:

> The change of governments, when it [government] changes they will take it [management contracts] from you if you are not strong. When this government changed, they wanted to take it, but we did not agree. So I am still handling it. That is why they built this one [a new site next door] . . . so they have wanted to take it for political affiliation, but in Alajo, we don't allow that. We fought it and they could not take it . . . they are now putting new ones.

Respondent NJ described the plight of anyone who holds an AMA contract: 'You know in Ghana, when politics change, your business also change; your plans change, they collapse.'

Respondent FA also pointed out that sanitation in Accra must always be understood as a resource that actors will contest and vie to control. He stated: 'When money is involved, then they will come. Everyone fights for money. If you are not strong they will take it from you.'

As with any resource, there are many interested parties vying for control of public toilets. Local news accounts regularly report 'strong arm' tactics by party footsoldiers to gain or keep control of public toilets. In certain neighbourhoods, toilets are particularly connected to the political parties. Respondent TN, a manager of an AMA toilet in Nima, received his contract after the last change in political leadership. However, it was made clear to him that the toilet site must be used to meet the needs of the party. As he explained:

> When the people come in, normally most of the people in this community, they don't pay. They go in free. It is just [a few people] that pay. It is due to the party. The party colours. We have to maintain it in such a way that the party looks good. We have a problem then, you understand?

At TN's site, he suggests that only 30 per cent of his customers actually pay the user fee for the toilet. Other locations from other neighbourhoods in the study suggest that between 75 and 90 per cent of customers pay the required user fee, at least in part, because other sites are not as politically oriented and private locations are not as likely to be pressured through political parties to provide a free service to the community.

The socio-political context of sanitation causes problems for many toilet sites. Operators do not know whether or when they might lose control of the facility. The respondents often expressed the idea that they do not undertake investment because they fear losing control of their toilet site after having made an investment. Further, from the standpoint of public toilet managers, overt political intervention into the management of the sites leads many toilets to fall below the break-even point at which proprietors, even politically appointed proprietors, are able to maintain basic-level standards at the facilities and make a small profit. In the long run, this means less sanitary conditions for users and overall restricted access.

While the survey on which this data is based did not include questions on user satisfaction, other studies have looked at the link between political interference and public toilet user satisfaction in Accra. User satisfaction is higher where commercial operators are able to respond to user preferences without overt interference by local government (Awortwi 2006).

Here the everyday reality is juxtaposed with the narrative of market-oriented solutions. Many toilet sites remain controlled by political parties, and the struggle between providers, political actors and the preferences of individual users creates the context for everyday service access and the parameters guiding the evolution of those services. More will be said about this below.

Unregulated market competition among public toilet enterprises

According to the analysis, the average toilet site in the sample has an estimated annual profit of about US$8,000. Lower-performing sites, approximately 30 per cent of the sample, are estimated to be near the break-even point at an estimated US$300 annual profit; much higher performers exist and can bring in as much as US$16,000 per year. All the toilet sites in the sample use technologies that require human waste to be stored temporarily on-site in pits, tanks, buckets and the like. Removing that waste regularly through vacuum trucks or by hand is the most expensive, and probably the most important, aspect of site maintenance. If toilet sites cannot afford to do this basic activity they cannot function and they go out of commission. As discussed above, this was the prevailing conditions of public toilets in the 1980s. As an example, Respondent CJ recalled:

> There was a time, a few years back when [emptying the holding tanks] was not all that easy. All the AMA toilets were choked. The managers said they were not getting revenue to come and dislodge [empty the tanks] or to pay their workers, so you can't use the toilets. This is the reason why we started to privatize them to individuals.

Here it is important to note two things. First, cost recovery depends not just on the user fee rate, but on the volume of customers. More customers are required for profitability if the user fee is relatively low. Second, as the user fee rises, thereby

enabling cost recovery, with each incremental price increase the price burden on customers also rises, and this is likely to constrain access to (effective demand for) sanitation. This is particularly true for children and women, who also bear the higher burdens of negative social impacts associated with restricted access to sanitation (Owusu 2010).

While it is conventional and intuitive to suggest that too many users at individual sites create unsanitary conditions and site maintenance problems, it is important to note that unregulated market mechanics are likely to have the adverse implications of there being too few users at a site. As Respondent KJ noted:

> When the first people started [to operate privatized toilet sites] the rumour went around that there was a lot of money in it, so people started to put up the public toilets, but it is not that good.

Respondent AB suggested the same: 'The customers are low, toilets are now too many. Previously it was not like this.'

This is important because although the average site is operating well above the break-even point, approximately 30 per cent of the sample reported being in potential danger of having to either raise user fees or dip below the revenue necessary to cover costs. This is a source of anxiety for these toilet owners, and is expressed in the sense that owners generally feel as though competition for toilet customers is rising. Respondent DA estimated that her customers were cut in half when a new toilet site opened very near hers. She expects she will have to raise her user fees soon if she is to remain in business. This underlines the political nature of many toilet sites, because it is common for respondents to describe how local party bosses will erect competing toilets near existing ones as a common form of political retribution when they are unable to evict a current toilet manager.

Currently the AMA does not regulate the location or distribution of public toilet facilities in an effective way. The narrative of the market suggests that under normal conditions we can presume that entrepreneurs will build new toilets as long as there are profits to be made. Eventually, it is thought, equilibrium will be reached, when there is an optimal number of sites at a cost users are satisfied with. Counter to the expectations of the market narrative, this situation is likely to continue to create considerable social costs. Approximately a third of the sample are performing poorly and in danger of dipping below the break-even point. Some 'weeding out' will be positive, as those with uncompetitive cost structures or poor management skills will exit the sector or more likely sell their sites to those who can run them more profitably. However, there is also the real possibility that increasing competition will apply downward pressure on the overall quality of service for these sites. We know from the above analysis that basic requirements should continue to be met by any site that remains open even with increasing competition; managers will have to perform basic maintenance such as emptying the waste holding tanks. However, under increasing competition, many could remain open while sacrificing the sanitary conditions required for public health,

such as cleaning, offering hand-washing stations, or affording acceptable levels of privacy to users. This scenario would constrain access to sanitation because people who depend on public toilets would either have fewer options because of the rising costs, or the worsening conditions of the sites would encourage more open defecation.

Opportunities for innovation and improvement

The unregulated market-oriented context allows for too much political interference and simultaneously introduces unhelpful forms of competition into the provision of public toilets. These issues no doubt have negative impacts on the lives of the citizens of Accra. That said, the data also suggest that even in the current system there is room for improved outcomes. The key is in creating scenarios that better tie the provision of these services to the desires and preferences of citizen users. In other words, there is room within the existing service provision structure to amplify the decisions of urban citizens and their impact on the evolution of those structures through the exercise of choice.

The following exchange between the researcher and Respondent DO is informative:

> JH: What then is the most important challenge [operating your public toilet site]?
>
> DO: The most important challenge is when people come they will enter your toilet and see how it is. If it is clean then you will get more customers because nobody would like to go where there is smell. If a person comes here twice and sees your place is good – where he was going, he can stop it there. We also make our toilet so that you can't get any sickness.
>
> JH: What are the things you have to do to make it a place where people want to come? What are people looking for?
>
> DO: The spray [chemical disinfectants]; and that the workers are washing it; and that there are not rubbers [plastic bags full of faeces]; and that there is water to wash your hands.

Another respondent, NO, expressed a similar sentiment: 'If the place is not organized, the person can go in, see it, and go on to the next place.' Her comment was in the context of discussing common conditions at public toilets, and she euphemistically described faeces on the floor as being 'not organized'. If customers find such conditions, they can go to the next public toilet.

The preferences of the people described by the toilet managers are intuitive and likely to be universal. While these preferences should have important connections to the way businesses operate, currently these links are often quite weak. While the above interaction is indicative of toilet operators who are in a position to seek greater profits through an increase in user volume, the two forces of the unregulated market dynamics explored above undermine these connections considerably. That is, the current context has both too little market logic,

whereby many sites are operated for political purposes to the detriment of the site's cost structure, and too much market logic, where increasing unregulated competition is likely to have pernicious effects. The preferences of users are lost among the din.

Innovative solutions are required to restore that link in the existing context. Mainstream development efforts have attempted to restore links by strengthening the 'long' and the 'short' route to improved services (World Bank 2003). This is a call for both improved client connections to service providers (short route) and citizen connections to those that create the policy context in which service providers operate (the long route). While these are worthy long-term goals, they are predicated on robust and transparent regulatory regimes in places that have had little such experience. Further, they are likely to reduce active citizenship to clientism. The pro-poor sanitation literature cited above is in some ways similar in its calls for more appropriate technology, the short route, and more responsive governance, the long route. These points are well taken, but neither camp's conception of the long or the short route will be successful if prescriptions include one-size-fits-all plans. Instead, service provision in contested contexts is far more likely to follow unpredictable or untamed paths guided by innumerable local negotiations, where individuals interact with social structures to co-create iterative change. The key is to amplify individual agency in these negotiations.

In Accra, the link to give individuals more power in iterative negotiations with service providers might come through certain types of specified intervention. These interventions must be careful not to interfere with the cost recovery logic or the need for owners to remain competitive by offering services customers want; this would ignore the everyday mechanics of toilet provision in the context. This rules out actively investing in new toilet sites without a deliberate spatial strategy. Also inappropriate are efforts to mandate a constant low rate or direct subsidy of the toilet owners' cost structure in order to keep fees low. Direct subsidies that do not connect sanitation provision to user preferences miss the point, and mandated fees below the cost recovery point would be self-defeating.

Instead, solutions could enable toilets to become more competitive by linking subsidies or in-kind solutions that are directly related to offering increasingly hygienic services where the cost of those services can remain stable for users. Experience has shown that regulatory bodies that might ostensibly oversee these activities are often weak or inept. Other ways are possible in this context because the sanitation crisis in Accra is in the midst of dynamic change, whereby the supply and demand aspects of sanitation are transforming. That human waste is seen as a valued resource means new revenue streams are available in the sanitation sector (Murray and Ray 2010). There is potential to use these new revenues to reinvest in toilet sites in a manner that is directly related to daily realities.

For instance, social enterprises that are currently profitably reusing effluent for fuel or fertilizer, whose mission it is to improve access to sanitation and promote sustainability, could reinvest in toilet sites in ways that increase the cleanliness and competitiveness of sites. This could be done, for example, through

partnerships with cleaning supply companies, and by helping sites source consistent fresh water supplies. These might be subsidies, but they are connected to the ability of providers to provide services to users and not directly to the cost structure of a site, and therefore they are not capturable as profit without improving service provision.

An active civil society in neighbourhoods that rely on public toilets is an important force in the connection between the operation of public toilets and people's everyday desires for how they are provided. It is important to note that Old Fadama is the lowest-income neighbourhood from which the sample of toilet sites were drawn. The whole neighbourhood has insecure tenure, the area regularly floods, it is adjacent to the city landfill site, and it is largely untouched by the city's infrastructure. However, organizations such as the Federation of the Urban Poor, People's Dialogue on Human Settlements, and Slum Dwellers International are active there, and their activists are the community leaders and residents of Old Fadama. One of the key informants for this study was a resident of Old Fadama and an employee of the Federation of the Urban Poor. He described how in Old Fadama the group has had some success organizing to manage several toilets and bring pressure on the AMA for greater responsiveness in terms of toilet inspections and the provision of disinfectant services. Within the sample, toilet sites in Old Fadama reported much higher rates of AMA responsiveness. This type of social organization will be required to apply pressure to force the connection between new revenue streams for sanitation providers and improved services.

A coalition of social enterprises and civil society organizations could establish a 'toilet users' bill of rights', which acknowledges the profitability of public toilets and 'certifies' certain sites according to community standards and acceptable user fees, thereby making certified toilets more profitable through increased usage. This solution would work in conjunction with a social enterprise or a strictly for-profit entity as waste reuser. In either case, toilet sites would be likely to get new revenue streams and/or positive income effects, and it will require an engaged civil society along with customer demands that make sure profits are reinvested in ways that improve the user experience. It is possible that such action could help bring about the desired connection between user preferences and governance, for which the mainstream and pro-poor scholarship both call. A re-engaged public sector, after recognizing the potential in evolving systemic change, could tie new taxation opportunities to resources for better regulation of hygienic standards.

Conclusion

The manner in which sanitation is provided for approximately 40 per cent of Accra's population raises significant questions about its largely unregulated market-oriented strategy. It leaves too much room for political interference, which on the one hand lowers user fees at many sites below what is needed to maintain those sites at hygienic levels while also building new sites for patronage rewards that dilute the customer base of existing sites. Also, without a spatial

strategy that requires submetro administrators to target where new private or AMA sites are located, how many sites overall are provided, and whom those sites are likely to serve, the cost structure of all sites is threatened, as are larger socio-ecological and public health goals. Taken together, basic sanitation service provision is unhelpfully disconnected from users' preferences, and the space for individual choices and collective agency to impact the structure and outcomes of service provision is too limited. This chapter has made suggestions about how to improve service provision in the midst of these challenges through tying future interventions directly to the competitive advantage of toilet sites based on user preferences.

The larger narratives surrounding sanitation in Accra and places like it seek to explain these situations through wide-angle and often tidy descriptions of how cities work. These narratives do not anticipate the complicated realities of daily life in real places (Scott 1998). This is true of the classic neoliberal approach as well as the critical response. The intent here is not to provide another set of one-size-fits-all recommendations. Instead, the suggestion is that in any socio-technical service provision configuration there are likely to be opportunities to amplify the voice of citizens through both individual choices and collective agency toward more equitable and sustainable outcomes. This requires a greater eye for detail and an appreciation for diversity and the messiness of innovative socio-ecological problem-solving.

Notes

1 Korboe *et al*. (1999) was a study of Kumasi, Ghana's second city. It is used here only to provide an estimate of the magnitude of sanitation user fees relative to household income.
2 For a more complete discussion of these debates see Allen, Hofmann and Griffiths (2008).

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