Governance Structures in Informal Settlements – A Study of Actors, Aims and Instruments in Addis Ababa

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Cities in the so-called developing countries are subject to increasing governance problems. One sign for weak control mechanisms seems to be the nearly ubiquitous informality that concerns almost every area of life. Informality is also reflected in urban planning and becomes manifest in different forms of informal housing, visibly encountered in slums and informal settlements. But there is evidence that informality is not to be equalised with a lack of governance structures and that informal settlements are not free from control and steering mechanisms.

In our paper we want to proof with empirical findings that informal as well as even formal arrangements actually do exist and intertwine in informal settlements. For this purpose we will present a case study carried out in Yerer, an informal settlement in the southeast of Addis Ababa, and identify the actors relevant for local governance systems, along with their aims and ambitions, resources and instruments.

A range of actors have proven to be relevant for governance structures and processes in Yerer: First of all the inhabitants of the informal settlement themselves have structured and restructured the settlement pattern through the acquisition of plots and a variety of building activities. By appointing a committee within their fellow dwellers the informal settlers furthermore succeeded already at an early stage to influence and control not only their respective pieces of land but also planning processes, spatial compositions and both technical and social infrastructures in the whole settlement. Also altogether formal actors and institutions in the administrative hierarchy of the city and the region of Addis Ababa put paid to completely uncontrolled development. In the case of informal settlements, their influence is admittedly minor to the internal forces but may not be neglected, notably not in the fields of dwellers' registration and the provision of technical infrastructure. In this case, formal institutions and local authorities, and especially the relationship the informal committee leaders have to them, even play a crucial role on the way to a potential formalisation of the settlement. Our presentation will conclude with the question whether such formalisation processes in informal settlements might support strong governance structures – or rather not.