RE-ALIGNING GOVERNMENT,
New challenges in urban and regional development
CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE MARKET
Essays in honour of G.A. de Bruijne  I. Baud, J. Post, L. de Haan, T. Dietz (eds.)
Re-aligning Government, Civil Society and the Market:

New challenges in urban and regional development

Essays in honour of G.A. de Bruijne
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COEN BEEKER

2.1 Introduction

Access to an officially recognized plot ranks high on the list of priorities of most families living in an African city. Such access offers them a certain amount of security in an environment characterized by numerous uncertainties. The feeling of ‘being at home’ has more value if your dwelling is not in danger. By listening carefully to people living in different urban neighborhoods, a marked difference in appreciation depending on the ‘status of their roof’ can be discerned. It matters a lot whether you own a residential plot in a planned settlement, are renting a room, have moved into a family compound, or occupy a dwelling in a spontaneous settlement. The rapid growth of the urban population over the past 25 years has pushed many families into relatively insecure tenure situations, notably those residing in spontaneous settlements. Organizing tenure security has become one of the major challenges facing the authorities of these rapidly expanding cities.

In this chapter I will discuss the planning approach adopted in the capital of Burkina Faso since 1980. I will look at the role and contribution of various actors – residents, public institutions, and donors – in the planning and development process. The approach has proven to be very effective in terms of delivering tenure security to numerous urban families. Therefore, the basic idea has been maintained and is also being applied in various core villages surrounding Ouagadougou. However, changes in the institutional structure resulting from recent decentralization policies as well as new legal provisions have introduced some complications. The chapter also deals with a number of planning problems – the development of urban markets, access to water, sanitation, and the planning of educational facilities – that have been addressed in a much less successful way.

2.2 The growth of Ouagadougou

Since 1960, urban areas in West Africa have absorbed two-thirds of the region’s population growth. Between 1960 and 1990, the urban population
increased by 6.5% per annum, and the number of cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants rose from 12 to 90 (OECD/ADB/CILSS, 1995). In 1960—the year Burkino Faso gained independence—approximately 60,000 people were living in its capital, Ouagadougou, or Ouaga as it is commonly known. Since then, Ouaga has received a large number of migrants, many of whom were looking for a job or training. The 1996 population census gives the number of people residing within the boundary of the Municipality of Ouaga at 750,000, while the Greater Ouaga Area is estimated to have 970,000 inhabitants (DGUT/PVCBO, 1999). The latter area comprises the municipality (divided into five zones) and seven rural departments. By the year 2010 it is expected that more than two million inhabitants will be trying to make a living within the Greater Ouaga Area.

The national government has done a great deal to provide the people residing in Greater Ouaga with security of tenure. Since the 1980s, more than 150,000 plots have been created, offering all families—regardless of income level—sufficient opportunities to invest in their own housing and to engage in economic activities on a legalized plot. It is worth taking a closer look at this exercise, which can be considered an early attempt at public-private collaboration in urban housing in the developing world.

In the early 1980s, the Ouaga planners had access to several studies concerning the interests and views of various stakeholders in the urban arena, as well as on the state of urban infrastructure. They provided a good basis for the design of a structure plan (Haskoning, 1984). This plan offered a rough indication of the spatial needs of various urban functions. It was officially adopted by the Central Planning Board of Burkina Faso in 1984. The Council of Ministers subsequently endorsed the structure scheme, albeit with some modifications. The transfer of the airport and an important military camp were rejected for financial and strategic reasons.

The new scheme offered the ministries concerned, national institutions, and partly also the municipality a document on which to base plans for the realization of the desired infrastructure and public facilities. It guided the extension of the main road network, the water and sanitation network, and the electricity grid and telephone network. The national budget for investments is under the direct control of central government. Although the political debate on giving more financial autonomy to the municipalities started in the 1980s, at the time all major decisions concerning the upgrading and extension of the main infrastructure and public facilities in Greater Ouaga were taken by central government agencies (Jaglin, 1991).

A major innovation of the new structure scheme was that it provided for the integration of existing spontaneous settlements as well as for new urban extensions. During Burkina Faso’s revolutionary period (1983-89), a more positive attitude towards spontaneous settlements took root. At the same
th more than 6,000 people were known. Since of whom were the number of Ouaga at 30,000 inhabitant-municipality year 2010 it is ing to make a de the people less of income and to engage closer look at public studies con-urban arena, as good basis for offered a rough was officially 4. The Council shared with some military camp al institutions, the plans for the It guided the network, and get for invest-though the polit-panalities started upgrading and Greater Ouaga it provided for for new urban 83-89), a more t. At the same time, however, the period was characterized by a top-down planning approach based on the belief that the government knew what was good for the people, and had the capacity and willingness to act on their behalf. Resi-dents were not given the opportunity to participate in the planning process, except as beneficiaries of externally conceived plans and interventions. Nev-ertheless, the structure scheme offered a strategy for the rapid integration of most of the spontaneous settlements in the planned urban environment, and this has certainly brought numerous benefits to its inhabitants.

2.3 The Ouaga approach

In 1980, only about 20,000 legal plots were available in the capital. At the time, an estimated 60% of the entire population in Ouaga lived in a spontaneous settlement. It was certainly not difficult to gain access to a piece of land in a village territory on the outskirts of Ouaga. Until the mid-1970s, the traditional chief of the land accepted chickens and cola nuts as gifts in exchange for his authorization to occupy a parcel of 200 – 800 m². Gradually, however, the chiefs – or their relatives who acted as facilitators – started demanding cash from those who wanted to obtain a plot of land within their territory. Although the allocation of plots by chiefs or their mediators was initially not structured by officially approved plans, it is remarkable to see how the spontaneous layouts have been adapted to fit the new structure plan. If one compares the 1991 map of Ouaga (which is based on aerial photographs) with the approved layout of the structure scheme in 1986, the resemblance between the two is remarkable. Apparently the scheme served as an effective guide for the restructuring of almost all spontaneous settlements in the period 1983/1989. This huge operation was partly financed by a donation from the Netherlands enabling the creation of 30,000 plots. The World Bank financed an operation involving another 5,000 plots, and a further 30,000 were financed through local funds. These plots were allocated to households who claimed a dwelling right, certifying that they had never received a legal plot elsewhere.

The large-scale parcelization was based on the idea that the upgrading of spontaneous settlements should follow a few simple steps. A small pilot project had shown that beneficiaries started restructuring their neighborhood as soon as they had received their plot. During the first phase, the project team only demarcated the official boundaries of the plots, using cornerstones, and installed a public water tap. If beneficiaries had to move their dwelling to a place inside the boundaries of the new plot, they usually did so in cooperation with their neighbors. They were given a year to do so. As the dwellings were made of mud, this requirement did not cause too many prob-lems. Most families reused all the available building materials, and the more
affluent families immediately started to invest in improving their dwelling. The positive attitude was also demonstrated by planting shade trees inside the new compounds. A year later, the land reserved for streets, schools, and other public facilities was cleared without providing those who were forced to move their house with any form of financial compensation. Subsequently, the main streets were leveled, facilitating access and transportation.

The total investment per plot was about US$ 80 in 1984. About 80% of the beneficiaries repaid this within a year, thereby creating a revolving fund for similar restructuring operations elsewhere. Following this strategy, almost all spontaneous settlements in Ouaga were restructured during the revolutionary period, thus providing 65,000 people with legal access to a plot.

The major strength of this large-scale parcelization was the affordability of the plots. More than 90% of the households in these spontaneous settlements were able to satisfy the financial conditions. The strategy was designed with the specific aim of serving all income groups. Measures were taken to support this goal. These included reducing building regulations to a strict minimum; one room with a roof of 12 iron sheets and a pit latrine was sufficient for the delivery of the legal occupation permit for the plot.

Families in various income brackets are now living together in building blocks in the same settlement. A building block usually comprises 10-25 plots and is surrounded by streets. In the restructured settlements, plot sizes usually range from 240 to 400 m². In an attempt to assess the impact of the operation a decade later, a small survey was conducted in 1998.

Out of a total of 359 investigated plots, 33 were not occupied and 44 had been sold by the original beneficiary. The 326 occupied plots provided accommodation for 2,777 persons, an average of 8.5 persons per plot. The investments in the built environment were calculated in more detail for some of the building blocks in 1998 and 2001 (material and labor costs). The average value of the built environment – including the dwelling, the construction of the separation walls between the plots, and the investments in pit latrines and septic tanks – was US$ 6,000 per plot. The Dutch government had donated US$ 2 million to finance the realization of 30,000 plots in various spontaneous settlements. Assuming this limited research offers a fair indication of the efforts realized by the beneficiaries of these 30,000 plots, one may conclude that a small donation has triggered a total investment from small private sources of about US$ 180 million over the past 15 years. This is a considerable achievement for a poor city. Furthermore, the trees planted by the inhabitants have helped to give the restructured territories of this Sahelian city a conspicuous green appearance.
2.4 Pitfalls in Ouaga’s planning

One of the merits of the first phase of the restructuring and parcelization operation was that it did not require large public investments. Most of the work was simple and straightforward, and was easily carried out by the planning team of the national Department of Urban Planning and Topography. During the second phase of the restructuring, however, the authorities were supposed to provide funds with which to realize schools, health centers, market places, garbage collection, and road construction. The municipality had even signed an agreement with the Department of Urban Planning and Topography, stating that it would take the required initiatives. The main problem was that the municipality had to call upon various ministries and national corporations to fund the planned actions. Schools are under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education, and controlled at the regional level by the relevant bureaucracy of the province. The Ministry of Health coordinates and finances all activities in the public health sector. Water and sanitation facilities are provided by a national corporation; the same applies to the supply of electricity, telephone connections, and garbage collection. The national roads in Ouaga are directly under the supervision of the Ministry of Infrastructure, Habitat and Urban Planning.

In fact, therefore, the role of the municipality was rather limited. It was in no position to really coordinate public investment within its territory, nor to influence decision-making on priorities within powerful national public institutions. Besides, the budgets of these agencies did not allow for much investment in urban infrastructure and facilities. This helps to explain the impact of various bilateral and international donors on actual developments in Ouaga. They have been involved in the implementation of several projects, and have done so largely in accordance with their own agendas. The following examples show some of the pitfalls of planning in Ouaga; some also illustrate the powerful role of donor agencies.

Development of urban markets

The first case concerns the market sector. According to the 1984 structure scheme, a series of markets was supposed to be developed in order to bring about a more balanced distribution of commercial activities over the urban territory. The plan stipulated the development of six satellite centers, one of which was to be the old Central Market. The original idea was that each satellite would be capable of satisfying all the needs of the households, institutions, and enterprises in its locality. Space was reserved for the development of these satellite centers in the plan. Figure 1 shows the markets that were registered and controlled by the municipality in 1990. Licenses were distributed to people interested in running a business there. However, development has
been slow because private investors are holding back, while the municipality is incapable of making the new markets more attractive.

What happened was that the entire Central Market area was restructured and turned into a modern business center. Merchants were required to work in an appropriate commercial building constructed of 'permanent' materials and having at least one floor. On the invitation of the government of Burkina Faso, the French Financial Agency for Development offered a loan of US $12.5 million for the reconstruction of this market area. A permanent market building was erected and the management of that building was transferred to a national society. The new company collects the fees from about 3,200 merchants. The fees were set at a level far above those charged before the demolition of the old market area in 1985. Many small market vendors were effectively removed from the site, and came back as street vendors in the spaces around the Central Market. Furthermore, the municipality lost its main source of income as a consequence of this donor-supported government intervention. Judging by the situation in 2001, it seems doubtful whether the
detrimental effects of this huge investment had been anticipated. It is a typical example of betting on the strong in the commercial sector of Ouaga.

Access to water
The second case concerns developments in the water and sanitation sector. The inhabitants of Ouaga depend for water mainly on the storage lake in Loumbila, which has a capacity of 12 million $m^3$ in a normal year but only 5.5 million $m^3$ in a dry year. Public wells and the three storage reservoirs in Ouaga provide an additional 6.8 million $m^3$ in a normal year, and 4.8 million $m^3$ in a dry year. The consumption of water in 1996 was more than 11 million $m^3$. Two-thirds of this water is used by clients with their own connection in their compound (25% of the urban population). The other third is distributed among the remaining 75% of the population via public taps or wells. The Water and Sanitation Company (ONEA) has tried to apply a fair tariff system to all users. Clients with a private tap sell water to neighbors who do not have the money needed for a connection of their own (FCFA 200,000 – about US$ 280). The higher the consumption from an individual connection, the higher the tariff charged. Water from the public taps is usually distributed by private water sellers using water barrels that are not always sufficiently cleaned. They charge high rates for their service, especially during the dry season. As in many other cities in Africa, poorer households pay 5-8 times more for water than households with a private connection.

A positive development is the installation of 60 independent public taps in the urban periphery in 1997, providing 5,700 $m^3$ of good quality water per day. This facilitates the access of women to safe drinking water at normal prices. The construction of a new dam in Ziga offers new chances for the water supply of Greater Ouaga. The capacity for exploitation is about 70 million $m^3$ per year. This may solve the capital’s water problem in the coming years. The distribution network will be extended from 521 km to 1,427 km. It is expected that 16,000 new private clients will be connected in the coming five years. The entire planned area (18,500 ha) will be served by this extended distribution system. According to plans, about 55% of the compounds in the center (Baskuy) will be connected in 2005, as will 30% in the other four municipal zones (DGUT/PCBO, 1999). Although the existing difference in access to potable water in the compound between the center and the other zones will remain, the water extension plans will ensure that almost all households will at least have a public tap within short walking distance. Both the improvement in access and the spread of investment over the entire planned urban territory are important achievements of the government, which was supported by the World Bank, Germany, and France as the main donors in this sector.
Sanitation: A real hazard
Most Ouaga households are expected to solve their own sanitation problems. The spacious layout of the city, low population density, and virtual lack of rain for almost eight months per year makes a sewerage system unfeasible. The best option seems to be to construct pit latrines in each compound. A ‘ventilated pit latrine’ program has been started, but has only reached a limited number of compounds. The program, although subsidized, is still too expensive for the large majority of poor families, especially because most do not consider sanitation top priority.

Despite these observations, a strategic scheme for the treatment of effluent has been prepared for the city, again with support of the international donor community. One of the projects stemming from this, and funded by the World Bank, involves the construction of four drainage canals that are supposed to drain more effectively the water from the occasional heavy flood during the short rainy season. However, two of these canals are made entirely of cement, and the cement floor prevents the infiltration of effluent water during the long dry period. The main drainage canal in Ouaga is a perfect breeding place for mosquitoes and flies, and a splendid resort for rats and other vermin (see photo). A careful environmental impact study would have identified these drawbacks. One may wonder whether such large investments are really justified in view of the lack of elementary sanitary facilities for the
large majority of urban households. Similar questions can be raised with respect to another project, the construction of a sewerage system for the Central Market area, two main hotels, the central hospital, and two industrial estates (ONEA, 1995). Except for the central hospital, the other beneficiaries are financially powerful players within Ouaga. If the realization of this project is really that important to these institutions, why don't they try to raise a commercial loan rather than call on development assistance?

It is certainly telling to compare the total contribution of the World Bank and France to these two projects (US$ 9 million) with the available budget for new ventilated pit latrines in the coming five years (US$ 0.6 million). With a US$ 9 million IDA loan, 30,000 plots could be equipped with a pit latrine. It would be a missed chance not to use these funds to address this dangerous sanitary situation.

Crowding in schools: A neglected issue
Access to a school for their children also scores high on the list of priorities of households in the capital. In 1995, the municipality of Ouaga had 261 public schools and 109 private schools. The average class size in the public schools was 101 pupils, and in private schools, 52. Table 2.1 indicates the number of children attending school in the five zones of Ouaga. The main constraint within the public schools is the high number of pupils per class. Therefore, classes are usually split into two groups of about 50 children each. One group is taught in the morning, the other in the afternoon. Private schools charge rather high rates and are not affordable to many families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.1</th>
<th>Number of children in school, and class occupancy rates in the five municipal zones of Ouaga in 1996.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Actual numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baskuy</td>
<td>24,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begodogo</td>
<td>21,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boulimigou</td>
<td>18,437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nongremassom</td>
<td>12,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signonghin</td>
<td>11,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Ouaga</td>
<td>87,627</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DGUT, 1999

The adjusted capacity of public and private schools in the Municipality of Ouaga in 1996 is only enough to satisfy 53% of the demand from children in the 6-12 age group (DGUT/PV CBO, 1999), i.e., 47% of the children in this group are not allowed to go to school. With a norm of 44 children per class,
only 25% of all children can receive primary education in Ouaga in 2001. Taking a more realistic norm of 60 children per class, the total number of classes required will be more than 5,000 in 2005, while only 1,446 classes were available in public and private schools in 1996. Who will finance all these classes and the training of the teachers? It is likely that an increasing number of children, especially those from poorer households, will be excluded from primary education in Ouaga, or at most receive poor training in excessively overcrowded classes. In the long run, this might threaten social stability in Burkina Faso’s capital.

2.5 Loss of impetus

The Ouaga approach to the restructuring of spontaneous settlements in the 1980s was a success. Nevertheless, in 1990 the government decided to stop the development of new planned areas. This led to a temporary freeze on legal plot allocation and title registration. Based on the New Land Reform Law, all rural and urban land was nationalized in 1984 (Government of Burkina Faso, 1996). This law (last revised in 1996) specifies that every Burkinabé is entitled to request a plot of his/her own at the age of 18. The traditional allocation process has no legal status, and people who have obtained a piece of land in this way cannot claim land-use rights to that ground. Nevertheless, occupation of such a parcel offers the best chance to be recognized in the future as beneficiary of the legalized plot. They only have to wait for the government to provide them with an opportunity.

However, the authorities were unable to stop the expansion of Ouaga, and sizeable new spontaneous settlements sprang up in the 1990s. The new settlers continued to arrange their ‘land rights’ in the customary way. Many families who were unable to benefit from the earlier parcelization operations – notably renters in the older planned settlements and people who previously had moved to a family compound – came to live in these new settlements. The price of a parcel of land in the urban periphery, however, quickly rose to beyond what less affluent families can afford. Besides, the payments – currently amounting to FCFA 70,000 (US$100) for an average plot – disappear in the pockets of anonymous chiefs rather than being invested in the upgrading of these settlements.

The only officially endorsed planning operation in Greater Ouaga resulted from a US$4 million grant by the Dutch government that helped to create 30,000 official plots in the period 1994-2000 in ten core villages surrounding the capital. The restructuring followed the successful formula that had been adopted in the urban periphery earlier on. It consisted of the preparation of a settlement plan for each village, the demarcation of residential plots in the field, the installation of public water taps, the leveling of the
main streets, the upgrading of markets, schools, and dispensaries, and the creation of a network of 250 km of secondary and tertiary roads connecting these villages. This road network has been considered as a general investment in the Greater Ouaga area.

2.6 New opportunities through decentralization

Like many other African countries, Burkina Faso embarked on the road to administrative decentralization in the late 1990s. Since 2000, both the mayor and the members of the local council must be elected. As far as planning is concerned, the decision was taken to transfer to the municipalities all responsibilities for the preparation and execution of new settlement plans. The announcement that the municipality would again engage in the legalization of various spontaneous settlements incited many people in Ouaga to invade the agricultural land of existing villages. The newcomers compensated the families that had worked the land previously. Although they did not immediately start living there, they tried to press their claims by erecting mud walls to demarcate their new plots. This act proved hard to ignore by the authorities in the new political set-up.

Elections need voters, and candidates will try to increase their chances of being elected by pleasing the constituency. The decentralization process offered local leaders an opportunity to restructure an important part of their territory. Political pressures were brought to bear on the municipality of Ouaga to execute a large-scale restructuring of spontaneous settlements and to parcelize agricultural lands located within the municipal boundaries. In 1999–2000, no less than 40,000 planned plots were realized. The municipality required beneficiaries to pay FCFA 35,000 if they already ‘owned’ a parcel of land in a spontaneous settlement, while those who had only registered for a plot had to pay FCFA 50,000. The traditional chiefs did not receive direct compensation for the loss of their agricultural lands, at least not from the government (which is a break with the past). However, the chief and various members of his extended family were indirectly rewarded by receiving legal titles to newly created plots on the family’s land. The market value of these plots rose tremendously after legalization. Of course, many beneficiaries actually paid twice for their plot; once to the traditional chief, and once to the municipality. Although the former practice is unauthorized, it is likely to continue. Therefore, the new Land Law has not succeeded in lowering the threshold for the poor to gain legal occupancy of a plot.

Nevertheless, the municipality will continue to be confronted with a high demand for new residential plots. In order to guarantee fairness in the allocation of newly planned plots, the authorities could consider using a lottery system. Furthermore, well-conceived initiatives to limit the spontaneous
settlement process in the urban periphery are desperately needed. The municipality should try to engage in a dialogue with the traditional chiefs on this subject, in an attempt to find solutions that are both practical and feasible.

A final remark on recent developments is that participation of the beneficiaries in the actual planning exercise continues to be at the bottom of the list, as no legal or regulatory provisions are made to include them. Usually, the municipality contracts a private consultancy firm to prepare and implement the new settlement plan. It depends on the quality of these firms whether the households concerned are offered an opportunity to express their views and priorities, regarding not only the parcelization operation, but also the realization of services.

Figure 2.2 Map of Greater Ouagadougou

2.7 The future of Greater Ouaga

Recently, actions were undertaken to design a new Structure Plan for Greater Ouaga Until 2010. In accordance with the existing Law on Land Reform, the
National Commission for Urban and Rural Planning was charged with guiding the preparation of the new scheme. From the outset it has tried to involve all the ministries and national institutions concerned in order to arrive at a more integrated urban development strategy. The widening of participation at the technical level – between the relevant public-sector bodies – is certainly a positive development. Local experts at the various institutions were asked to investigate the situation in the field, to register major trends in their domain, and to develop alternatives for the future expansion of the capital. These studies were discussed at two national seminars and supplementary meetings of the National Commission. Each ministry was given sufficient time to introduce final corrections to the proposed actions in this structure plan. The final document was adopted by the Council of Ministers in 1999 (DGUT/PVCBO, 1999)

The new structure scheme shows a preference for the future expansion of the city to be toward the east. It also indicates sizeable tracts of land for irrigated agriculture and cattle breeding, and supports the further consolidation and restructuring of core villages and spontaneous settlements. For each period, the document specifies a large number of programs and projects, and indicates the major actors and their responsibilities. Unfortunately, the financial basis for the realization of proposed actions is extremely weak. In view of the limited funds at the government’s disposal, priorities have to be set. But who will control this process? So far the urban communities themselves have had no say in these matters. There is a real danger that history will repeat itself, with each department and institution using the Structure Plan in an opportunistic way. They will select the interventions they deem most essential without consulting either the municipality or the public at large. These will subsequently be presented to the donor community for co-financing. But who will defend the interests of the majority of poor citizens, who want their children to be able go to school or to have a simple sanitary facility in their compound? It is likely that the main loans from the World Bank for the extension and maintenance of basic infrastructure and facilities (waterworks, drainage, etc.) will continue to be channeled to the ministries and national public bodies. Perhaps the new decentralized structure offers some hope. Bilateral donors, for example, could very well decide to transfer their resources to municipal authorities, which are closer to the people. By helping them to create their own revolving funds they can be given a greater leverage in helping to alleviate the problems their poor citizens face.

2.8 Final remarks

The Declaration of Human Rights clearly states the right of every human being to shelter, education, health, and an acceptable livelihood. The defense
and promotion of these rights in human settlements can be considered a major responsibility of the international donor community. However, donors do not automatically advocate the interests of the poor. All African countries lobby to attract funds to finance major infrastructure programs. A recent OECD publication (‘Improving Aid to Africa’) identifies several important weaknesses in the methods applied in international and bilateral cooperation. Burkina Faso is one of a great many countries that lack a clear identification of priorities, and do not have sufficient capacity to prepare main infrastructure projects or to evaluate the performance of the aid programs implemented in various sectors (Walle et al., 1999). The World Bank report ‘Attacking Poverty’ (2000) correctly states that the system of monitoring and assessing the impact of donor-funded projects has failed to show whether and, if so, how poor people benefit. Nevertheless, the donor community may be the best actor to defend the interests of the large majority of the population. It has the political and financial power to make a difference. The participation of the urban population itself in choosing priorities concerning major infrastructural works is simply not realistic. Being a local advocate for the poor can even be extremely dangerous. The killing and burning in 1999 of the chief editor of a local newspaper in Burkina Faso was the dramatic fate of an honest, socially engaged reporter. However, the international donor community is still a long way from becoming the ‘natural’ partner of the poor. It requires a radically different approach. A bilateral partnership, based on equality and mutual understanding, offers real opportunities to articulate the basic rights of the silent majority in urban and rural areas.

References