Chapter 2

Debating the Informal Sector and Urban Planning in Botswana

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reflects on the relationship existing between the state and the informal sector in Botswana. Despite embracing global calls for inclusive human settlements, the relationship between the state and the informal sector in Botswana equivocates between hostility and tacit recognition. This ambiguity is explained in terms of two overlapping stances, namely, the elitist and exclusionist natures of the country’s settlement planning legislation. Botswana’s settlement planning legislation plays a significant role in the creation of the informal sector, yet the existence of this same sector would not be openly embraced. Relying on the concept of human rights and justice implied in calls such as “just cities,” “right to the city,” and “sustainable livelihoods,” this chapter makes a case for coproduction of interventions with a view to establishing inclusive and sustainable human settlements that recognize the unavoidable nature of the informal sector.
INTRODUCTION

This chapter reflects on the state-informal sector relationship in Botswana. Despite embracing global calls for inclusive and sustainable human settlements, the relationship between the state and the informal sector in Botswana equivocates between hostility and tacit recognition. Within the Global South urbanisms discourse, the informal sector features as one of the hotly debated topics. This is not surprising as the informal sector which accounts for 72% of non-agricultural employment in sub Saharan Africa (ILO, 2002), provides homes and sources of livelihoods for over two-thirds of the urban population (UN Habitat, 2003). The British anthropologist Keith Hart is credited with the coinage of the term ‘informal sector’ in 1973, which was later adopted and popularized by the International Labour Office. Since then, the informal sector has never ceased to be topical and according to Chen (2007 p.1) the subject has gone in and out of fashion in international development circles. Chen, (2007 p.1) further contends that the informal sector has not only grown but it has also emerged in ‘new guises and unexpected places.’

Despite the widespread recognition of its significance to the livelihoods of many urban residents in the Global South, historically the informal sector’s relationship with Governments wavers between hostility and tacit recognition. Like in other countries in the Global South, informality is a major feature of Botswana’s urbanisation process. In Botswana, enterprises belonging to the informal sector are those not registered with the Registrar of Companies or legal professionals who run informal accounts or none at all and employ five (5) or less persons and whose expenditures are not easily distinguishable from household expenditures; these kinds of enterprise are often temporary or mobile or set up in owner’s home (Statistics Botswana, 2007 p.2007). The relationship between the state and informal sector in Botswana is interspaced with episodes of hostility whereby street vendors are forcibly evicted from the streets and their goods confiscated by local authority agents (see for example Molebatsi et.al. 2018). Increasingly though, there has been a shift towards acceptance and recognition of the informal sector. This is partly attributable to global calls for sustainable, resilient and sustainable human settlements sponsored by international organizations such as the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements as well as financial institutions like the World Bank. Radical and critical urban planning scholarship and Social Movements Organizations continue to exert pressure on governments to embrace and implement planning interventions founded on ‘just cities’ and the ‘right to the city’ concepts (see for example Purcell, 2013; Marcuse, 2009).

Leveraging on global calls for the ‘right to the city,’ and the search for sustainable and inclusive human settlements, this chapter discusses ways of bestowing on the informal sector, its rightful place in the production of urban spaces in Botswana.
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