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Napier, Mark, Berrisford, Stephen, McGaffin, Rob, Napier, Mark, Royston, Lauren

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Chapter 4

Getting land governance right in sub-Saharan cities: More than land administration

Stephen Berrisford

It is too easy to argue that land markets will work better for poor women and men if the laws that govern the different dimensions of those markets are rationalised and improved. If laws are clearer, simpler and fewer, the argument goes, then transaction costs are lowered, opportunities for corruption are reduced, and the general populace is better able to participate in and benefit from the market.

A number of high-level international agencies call for a more rational and efficient system of land and planning laws. For example, the 2009 World Bank Urban and Local Government Strategy (World Bank 2009:16) asks, ‘How then should cities proceed?’ It then answers its own question by pointing out that:
Experience suggests that only a few regulations are critical: minimum plot sizes and minimum apartment sizes, limitations on floor area ratios, zoning plans that limit the type of use and the intensity of use of urban land, and land subdivision ratios of developable and saleable land in new greenfield developments. (World Bank 2009:16)

The solution to this apparently straightforward task is that:

Cities can use urban planning audits to determine which regulations should be changed to enable density and urban form to move in tandem with urbanisation.

This illustrates an optimistic hope that the mere act of regulatory rationalisation will trigger desirable market outcomes.

More recently the following point was identified as one of the key issues raised at the 2012 World Urban Forum in Naples:

Legal and regulatory frameworks aimed at giving access to land for the urban poor should be based on clear understanding of how urban land markets work. (UN-Habitat 2012b)

This brief statement suggests that the conceptualisation and design of new legal and regulatory frameworks for urban land needs to be grounded in an understanding of how the market works. It moves beyond the hope that legal reforms will in and of themselves lead to market outcomes that are more favourable to the poor and excluded. This approach complements that of the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Raquel Rolnik, who argues that:

It is increasingly recognised that land administration and urban planning cannot be considered purely technical matters. They can be manipulated to serve private interests, with major risks of exclusion and
discrimination. This is especially problematic when the rule of law is absent or out of reach of the poorest and most vulnerable. (Rolnik 2012:16)

She goes on to ask, ‘Who benefits from the status quo and who is excluded? Who sets the agenda for land governance and land management reform? How are the benefits of reform distributed?’ (ibid.). These are questions that have to be answered before embarking on urban land reform. Central to finding answers to these questions is an understanding of how the market in urban land operates.

Closer to home, the fourth meeting of the African Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development in 2012 issued a strategy document published by UN-Habitat, Optimising the Urban Advantage, that argues:

[There is an] urgent need to review and adapt the corpus of laws guiding urban development and the delivery of basic services […] Several countries are right now engaged in the exercise of enacting and/or reconciling laws pertaining to planning, local governance, and service delivery. It may be useful, while taking advantage of the reform momentum, to review existing laws with the objective of streamlining them and bringing [them] into line with the desire of promoting compact urbanism. It is also desirable to adopt simple norms and basic principles that can guide urban development and facilitate the transmission of tools and guides to end-users. (UN-Habitat 2012a:12)

Here again, the emphasis lies on a challenge that is primarily one of simplification, of ‘streamlining’ and of isolating ‘simple norms and basic principles’. Without negating the value of such interventions, they represent an incomplete picture of what is needed to get urban land markets to deliver real opportunities to the majority of citizens. These reforms are often necessary, but they are very seldom sufficient. The philosophical and political foundation of the laws also has
to change, to create an urban land governance system that addresses what Raquel Rolnik (2012:16) describes as the ‘political economy issue’, the fact that ‘the laws, institutions and decision-making processes relating to the access and use of housing and land are highly influenced by the existing power relations within society’.

This chapter first discusses an idealised vision of how an urban land governance system works. This is a vision that differs starkly from the urban land governance reality, especially in the cities of sub-Saharan Africa. Many of the proposed elements of urban legal reform are premised on the assumptions that underpin this vision. The chapter outlines how the sub-Saharan African context differs from the idealised vision, and proposes a pragmatic approach to achieving fundamental urban legal reform over time.

How urban land governance is meant to work

In the idealised city, the state and its citizens work symbiotically to create better places for people to live and for businesses to generate profits. Whether the state is represented by local, sub-national or national government, the consensus is that state efforts alone cannot produce a vibrant, liveable city. That requires a complementary blend of individual investment and energy with the judicious exercise of state regulatory power and, of course, state investment. Similarly, merely cramming lots of people together in close proximity to each other does not make a city.

The qualities of urbanity emerge from balancing individual (and often competing) interests, and this is generally best achieved through rules and the adjudication of possible breaches of those rules. The institutions responsible both for the promulgation of those rules and their adjudication need not necessarily be state bodies. Often, especially in those parts of the cities that are not formally planned or approved, these bodies operate by customs developed over time, or by bodies that reflect context-specific combinations of state and non-state authority. However, this chapter focuses on the state-based rules and institutions, but examines them in light of their inevitable integration and overlap with non-
state bodies. Most of the impetus for urban land market governance reform comes from the premise that it is the state’s machinery that has to change – the rules as well as the rule-making and rule-adjudicating bodies.

In the idealised vision of urban land governance, the state exercises its regulatory powers to mitigate the negative economic, social and environmental impacts of land development and land use of individual households and firms and ensures that the benefits are shared equitably. This scenario depends on a virtuous cycle of urban land governance, depicted in Figure 2. It is also reflected in UN-Habitat’s 2013 *State of the World’s Cities* report:

One positive outcome of urban growth is that it increases urban land values. Components of urban planning systems – such as re-zoning, granting of planning permission, and the provision of infrastructure and services – also contribute to higher urban land values. Experience in North and Latin America shows that value capture can be an effective way to link urban planning and land use regulations, as well as to control land use, finance urban infrastructure, and generate local revenue to fund urban management. (UN-Habitat 2013:94)

In the virtuous cycle of urban land governance shown overleaf, the state puts in place a regulatory framework (institutions and rules) to manage and administer land tenure, land use and land development. As that regulatory framework is implemented it creates land value, primarily through ensuring certainty for investors large and small. As that land value grows so it is taxed by the state, establishing flows of revenue that can then be reinvested both in the effectiveness of the regulatory frameworks, and in the construction and maintenance of physical infrastructure. This creates more land value, which in turn builds more revenue that enables the state to plough more money into the urban system. The higher the level of security in investment, the more people – from the poorest household to the largest multinational – will invest in their land and property. The cycle
grows inexorably stronger over time, albeit subject to the ebbs and flows of the property market and the economy as a whole. The inherent logic of this cycle reinforces itself, driven by mutually reinforcing incentives and pressures.

**FIGURE 2** The virtuous cycle of urban land governance

This is the model that policy-makers hold close to their hearts. It is the premise on which they design governance interventions in the urban land sector. Both country government officials as well as the representatives of the major international development agencies believe that, if this cycle can be established, it will be impelled by its own dynamism and its own internal logic to resolve the multitude of urban dysfunctions and inefficiencies so prevalent in our cities.

The work of Urban LandMark, however, reveals the deep and often irreparable fractures in that argument. It shows that a different logic is needed to guide urban land governance in African cities. This new logic has to be built on the back of a much more astute and nuanced understanding of how urban land markets work and how the majority of citizens secure their homes and businesses in the context of overwhelming poverty, weak governance structures and political flux.
How the model cracks

The conditions prevailing in most African cities make it virtually impossible to attain the urban land governance ideal described above. That African cities are diverse and different is trite, but that they experience a range of shared challenges – especially in relation to urban land governance – is also widely acknowledged. The challenges that most starkly undermine the logic of the virtuous cycle of urban land governance include the following:

1. Regulatory frameworks for urban land governance prescribe standards for legal procedures, for land tenure certainty, for physical construction, and for land use that impose costs that are not affordable for most citizens.
2. State institutions – at all levels – lack the political confidence and capacity to apply these prescribed standards to the wealthy and powerful, who tend to be the only people materially in a position to comply with them.
3. There is inevitably widespread non-compliance. Compliance becomes the exception rather than the norm. This manifests in poor building quality and a relative scarcity of secure, formal land tenure rights.
4. Where standards are applied and enforced it tends to be done selectively and punitively, with the effect of worsening the already precarious position of the poor and marginalised.
5. Where land value is created through the application of the regulatory framework, it arises from the scarcity value created by rules that apply to a limited part of the city and which exclude the majority of both citizens and properties. Consequently the price of land and land development opportunities in those areas rises rapidly.
6. Most land in the city is not registered in official land registration systems, does not have official building permission, and falls instead under a range of more localised land governance systems in which the state invariably plays a limited role and in which community or customary leaders exercise de facto power.
7. The capacity of the state to levy property-based taxes or indeed
any taxes at all is limited. There is thus no revenue-based incentive for the state to extend the application of the land governance regulatory framework since doing so is unlikely to give rise to a material improvement in the public fiscus. Instead, such application is more likely to generate community hostility, incur the anger of local politicians and aggravate officials’ own and already overwhelming experience of conflict and frustration.

8. Even where there is effective collection of property-based revenue, the weak, often corrupted, governance structures are under immense pressure to direct those funds towards meeting a host of needs other than re-investment in the management of the urban environment.

This damning picture of urban land governance in African cities needs to be qualified in two ways. Firstly, it is not only in African cities that the virtuous cycle of urban land governance breaks down. The universally contested nature of both city politics and urban land markets ensures that the cycle is under pressure everywhere, particularly from vested interests. From Vancouver to Vientiane examples abound of the cycle cracking, if not breaking down completely. The virtuous cycle is never perfectly realised, but in African cities the breakdown is most striking and most pervasive. Secondly, as indicated earlier, African cities are diverse and the intensity and scale of urban land governance challenges differ widely between them. Nevertheless, one would be hard-pressed to find a city on the continent where the day-to-day reality of land governance matches the virtuous cycle even loosely.

The picture in African cities is thus one in which the cycle operates erratically at best, and more often than not fails to operate at all. In the limited cases where it does operate with a modicum of efficiency, it does so to the benefit of entrenched and vested interests. This confluence of failures paints the poor into a tight corner, regardless of the numerous examples of poor people developing ingenious and practical escape routes from such circumstances. The dominant logics that drive the urban land governance system in practice, whether through the institutions of the state or community-based structures, are rent-seeking, political patronage and
ethnic solidarity. These combine to create a series of trip-wires that contain poorer citizens physically within certain parts of the city, and trap them economically in a part of the market in which there is inadequate protection of investment. They place the poor under unacceptable threat of displacement and put a ceiling on asset value growth. Poor people excluded from participation in the formal land market demonstrate a resolute and flexible capacity to adapt and to improve their situations within the informal market. However, they remain cut off from the benefits afforded to those able to participate in the formal market. The longer the division between the two remains, the more difficult it is to breach, and the deeper patterns of inequality are entrenched.

The idealised governance model cracks precisely because the phenomenon that is being governed is a market, in which participants compete for the best possible material advantage. It is very difficult to see the ideal model working where cities are so dominated by poverty, where urbanisation pressures are so strong, and where opportunities for economic improvement are so scarce. The relative scarcity of opportunities to participate in the formal land market places enormous pressure on the holder of such opportunity to realise the maximum financial value from it and enables him or her to ask a very high price. For poor people lucky enough to gain access to such opportunity through a process of regulatory reform, the most rational financial decision is to sell it. For those not so lucky, the high price barrier ensures that such opportunity will continue to elude them. Interventions explicitly designed to achieve, sustain and grow high land values will always create a market dynamic that, unless mitigated by other measures, will progressively exclude the poor.

If one considers any of the individual steps that are likely to be recommended as part of the realisation of the idealised cycle of urban land governance one quickly sees how the implications for the poor in a typical African city are probably negative. For example, one can argue that the first step would be the delineation of individual plots and the granting of a title deed to the rightful holder of the plot. Yet, where family configurations are fluid and patriarchy is strong, there is a high probability that the person to
benefit from this initiative acts to dispossess other members of the household who, until then, had enjoyed relatively secure tenure. In the same situation it will soon become apparent that the likely costs of complying with the legal requirements for surveying, registering and transferring the plot will exceed the financial capabilities of all but the wealthiest citizens. Any calculations by the land administration gurus of how much property tax revenue the local municipality will be able to skim off the land values created out of the newly individualised and registrable plots, collapse in the light of the political difficulty of extracting revenue from the people who can least afford it and who represent a major voting constituency. For the foreseeable future the value of regularising informal, unregistered or unlawful land holdings or land uses for the purposes of raising municipal tax revenue is ephemeral and perhaps a distraction. In the medium to longer term, however, it has to be kept squarely in the reformers’ sights. Ultimately it will be the basis on which the incentives are developed to create a system of urban management that works effectively for all citizens.

Furthermore, any governance intervention with the aim of raising the value of land within the formally registered system is one that is likely to have an exclusionary effect on the poor. Let us remember that land on which to live and work is neither a luxury nor a privilege, but a universally acknowledged human right. The higher the price of urban land, the more difficult it will be for poorer people to secure and hold it, and the greater the prospects of those who are already better off, improving their material conditions.

A mismatch between governance and impact

The resources of official state agencies are focused on the regulation and control of transactions at the top end of the market. Institutions such as, in South Africa, the offices of the Registrar of Deeds and the Surveyor-General, create a system described proudly as world class, but in fact are acknowledged by a World Bank study as affording too much protection to the sanctity of property transactions. The study by advisers Gavin Adlington and Tony Lamb (World Bank 2011)
argues cogently that the effect of the state checking, double-checking and checking again each and every property transaction, is one of high fees and transaction costs. This results in large numbers of people operating outside the system, carrying out informal and unregistered transactions. The limited state capacity to perform these functions is thus confined to the processing of transactions at the top end of the market, with little left over to manage those at the bottom. The phenomenon of more than a million subsidy houses built and handed over to beneficiaries in South Africa without accompanying title deeds is but one manifestation of this problem, amply demonstrated in Urban LandMark’s 2011 publication *Investigation Into the Delays in Issuing Title Deeds to Beneficiaries of Housing Projects Funded by the Capital Subsidy* (Gordon et al. 2011).

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the majority of people get on with carrying out urban land transactions outside the statutory system. They create local and customary land governance institutions and practices that are affordable and relatively efficient. These institutions and practices do not provide the level of assurance provided by state structures and systems, nor do they necessarily launch a household on to the formal property ladder. But they are affordable, they are widely used, and they are clearly sufficient for many purposes. State institutions frequently express frustration, even outrage, that these practices continue, yet there is very limited movement within the state apparatus to change the very real, widely acknowledged factors that make the formal system so unattractive to so many people.

The reality that confronts us grows only more absurd and is less and less likely to lead to a workable future. On the one hand state resources focus on the maintenance of exceptionally high legal and procedural standards. This raises the costs of participating in a formal property transaction to unaffordable levels. On the other hand citizens in their millions get on with the business of buying, selling and renting urban land independently of that system, using organs of state that ought to be applying their scarce resources to achieve entirely different policy objectives. Thus, for example, the local police officers are drawn into the certification of property transfers instead of focusing on their mandate to fight crime.
Municipal councillors adjudicate property-based conflicts rather than representing their constituents’ interests in the municipal council. The energy, the money and the innovation that could be directed towards creating a more inclusive and more efficient system are instead channelled into processes that perpetuate the already wide gaps between the wealthy and the poor. The illusion that the current system of governance might one day be made to work for everyone fuels an approach that effectively entrenches privilege and marginalises the poor. This is an approach that is not sustainable. It also pulls the rug of legal certainty out from under the urban land assets handed over as part of state-driven land and housing programmes.

Invariably this picture, which is primarily applicable to national institutions, also appears at the municipal level. Here the planning and land use management systems seek to address an ever widening number of environmental and economic objectives through the addition of more and more procedural and regulatory requirements. Containing urban sprawl, conserving architectural and cultural heritage, regenerating inner cities, protecting high potential farmland and managing biodiversity are each, for example, individually laudable activities of the state. Taken together, however, they have the cumulative effect of constraining the supply of formal land development opportunities and thus increasing the price of urban land for development within the formal system. They also add substantially to the professional burden carried by an increasingly beleaguered cohort of municipal officials, reducing their capacity to address the urban land needs of the poor and the marginalised. So great is the strain on these officials in many municipalities that, not only are they constrained from applying their expertise to the needs of the urban poor, but they are also frequently rendered incapable of fulfilling a wide range of other mandates. In practice they are thus effectively hobbled in their efforts to regulate or guide the activities of powerful interests in the land development system. Consequently they are seldom able to achieve the environmental and economic objectives that depend on firm and confident governance, while simultaneously maintaining ever-higher barriers to the poor. The complaint that more capacity is needed to ensure
implementation often elides into the complaint that more capacity is needed to carry out service delivery to the poor, without a critical assessment of what should be implemented and how it might impact on the needs and interests of poor communities, especially in relation to their circumstances within the urban land market. Directing capacity and resources towards a system that leads inexorably towards more exclusion and less access for the various categories of poor people is clearly not a good idea.

Two strands of intervention

Urban land governance in any context is complex. It is never a straightforward approach of applying legal and economic formulae to achieve a stated set of objectives. Urban land is characterised by its unique attributes as both an asset supporting wealth creation as well as a source of livelihood and the basis for family and household security. Its political and economic value is so significant that it seldom yields to one-dimensional prescriptions. Nowhere is this truer than in southern African cities, which combine historical legacies of oppression and dispossession with contemporary challenges of inefficient economies, unsafe, unhealthy (and deteriorating) environments, weak institutions of (formal and customary) governance and extraordinary inequality.

The southern African urban context is not only complex, it is one that is dominated by elite interests that are both diverse and frequently unaccountable. Whether in the form of large landowners able to hold city authorities to ransom, traditional leaders balancing their historical role with opportunities to exploit vulnerable subjects, state agencies retaining large parcels of land, or economic and political elites with significant personal investments in urban land, none of these interests has much to gain from wider participation by the poor in the urban land market. At most, participation is perhaps viewed as holding the bare minimum of property assets needed to survive and provide reasonably convenient labour services.

Intervening with a view to strengthening the position of the poor in the urban land market thus requires both a many-pronged
approach and a medium- to long-term perspective. There are no quick fixes to breaking down the barriers that keep the poor on the physical and economic margins of the urban land market. Nor will one intervention alone be likely to have a meaningful impact. The powerful vested interests that benefit from the current patterns of operation of the market will always and necessarily oppose such interventions. Consequently a strong political dimension arises in the design of any set of possible interventions.

Urban LandMark has come up with a number of proposed interventions, many of which are set out in the 2012 publication Managing Urban Land: A guide for municipal practitioners. Essentially the approach advocated is to approach the market from two directions. Firstly, interventions are needed to enhance the supply of affordable urban land tenure and land development opportunities. This demands a series of legal and institutional reforms that break down barriers to access, ensuring a stronger and more consistent flow of legally secure land market opportunities. Such opportunities consist both of legally protected rights that can be held, traded for fair value and augmented over time, as well as interests that might lack the same legal protection, but afford the holder of the interest greater security, especially of tenure, and the use and development of land. The reforms required to realise such opportunities include, for example, simplifying and rationalising the requirements for registering land rights, facilitating the approval of land use changes, and using planning processes to recognise the interests of people living in cities even where they do not necessarily enjoy formal rights to land or a building. Infusing all these efforts has to be the concern that the holders of the newly supplied opportunities are able to hold on to them in ways that enable them to derive sufficient financial, social and economic advantage.

These interventions have to keep in mind the twin concerns of lowering transaction costs as well as lowering the actual cost of taking up an urban land opportunity. In an urban environment there is always competition for financial opportunities and this is especially so in relation to land tenure and land use. The tighter the supply of land opportunities, the higher the price. Ensuring access to these opportunities thus depends on sustaining that supply.
An important way of lowering the risk of downward raiding by better-off citizens seeking cheaper land opportunities, is to sustain and grow the supply, creating an expanding pool of opportunities that can both meet more demand and moderate price increases.

As the supply of urban land opportunities is increased, it becomes important to generate land value capture mechanisms, to ensure that both the investment by the state in enhanced supply, as well as the windfall benefits of that investment, are recouped. Lall et al. (2010: xxxv) acknowledge that using ‘regulations rather than pricing’ creates a ‘trade-off between environmental sustainability and greater economic efficiency of the city’. This trade-off can be very stark in the case of African cities, presenting city governments with almost impossible choices. Lall et al. go on to argue that an ‘alternative fiscal instrument based on capturing land values’ could be more effective at achieving desired spatial and economic outcomes.

Secondly, a different set of interventions is needed to strengthen the ability of the poor effectively to demand these same opportunities. Here initiatives to promote and strengthen incremental land tenure as well as policy interventions to support small-scale private rental all have roles to play. A key contribution has been the evidence of just how resourceful and innovative poor people are at establishing and participating in informal land markets (e.g. Marx 2007). It also shows that despite such ingenuity they remain effectively trapped in markets that accommodate trade in assets (informally designated land), but which bar them from accessing the market that supplies the more valuable and more strongly protected asset of formally recognised land. The challenge is how to create effective demand among people currently excluded from the operation of the formal market, to enable them to participate efficiently and easily, and to establish a basis on which to build, incrementally, an increasingly strong and resilient foothold in a market where the odds are stacked against them.

In cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town there is an appetite for procedural innovations, using existing town planning regulations that recognise the interests of poor people in remaining securely in their homes despite a lack of other legal requirements for secure tenure. This example represents one way in which a
municipality can innovatively (and with relatively little effort) strengthen the position of poor people vis-à-vis land market forces, making it possible for them to create incrementally a more solid platform on which to build a more secure home (Smit & Abrahams 2010: 23, City of Cape Town 2012:5.2).

Parallel to innovations such as these must also be the development of an efficient and progressive system of property-based local taxation. As the state apparatus begins to expand the effective demand for urban land opportunities, and as less well-off citizens begin to exercise that demand, so the state needs to bring them into the property-based taxation system, slowly but surely. This is how the eventual realisation of the idealised cycle of urban management will be achieved. Whitehead et al. (2010:67) highlight the risks of rapidly developing countries trying to regulate their control over their urbanisation processes, risks that are ‘fraught with the danger of enriching particular groups at the cost of the community as a whole’. She concludes however that, if the regulation manages to ‘enhance efficiency, government may have to accept rent seeking as a necessary cost – while at the same time attempting to improve enforcement procedures within general legal and taxation systems’ (ibid.), thus showing the need to match regulatory reforms with fiscal reforms.

There are thus two strands of intervention. One involves tackling the supply of urban land market opportunities from within the organs of the state and through relatively high-level legal and policy reform. The second strengthens the demand for these opportunities, focused on more practical, more local and more direct interventions to support poor households to establish and protect their interests (see Chapter 3). These are two streams of intervention, moving in different directions, but with the shared end goal of a governance system that is both fairer and gives more options to poorer people to exercise choice and to protect the value of their investments in their homes and businesses. No single legal or policy intervention is the answer to achieving either strand of intervention. Achieving them will be the product of ongoing and sustained pursuit of individual measures, built on a growing body of evidence and advocacy, and incrementally piecing together a system that works both more efficiently and more equitably. Interventions that are likely to have
a beneficial impact on access to the market for poorer households will often meet resistance from elite interests responding to threats, real or perceived, to their interests. Achieving these interventions is thus inevitably a protracted and contested process.

A new agenda for urban land governance reform

Although significant new thinking is emerging (including through the activities of Urban LandMark), this work also highlights areas in which further and more rigorous research is needed. The emergence of new thinking lays the basis for a new agenda for urban land governance reform, but signals that significant further work is needed to drive that agenda into the future. In particular the challenge lies in taking up Raquel Rolnik’s (2012) call to address the ‘political economy issue.’ As a new agenda is built on the idea of two strands of intervention, so too there has to be constant vigilance that the different areas of intervention are striking at the heart of the market forces that currently drive Africa’s urban land markets. Are they addressing inequality? Are they building a foundation for a system of city governance that not only gives more people access to urban land market opportunities, but also supports them to remain in control of those opportunities and to grow them over time?

A sufficiently full understanding of how the ‘whole’ urban land market works in a city is still elusive. Is there any articulation or causal link between price movements at the high end of the market and those lower down? Do we fully appreciate the costs of participating in the more formal parts of the land governance system? Are our legal and institutional arrangements appropriate to carry the market forward in a way that will make it work better for the poor? Answering these and other questions requires more rigorous research and a sustained programme to draw out more compelling arguments for the two strands of intervention to make the market work better for the poor. We must direct governance instruments in Africa’s urban land markets to strengthen, not weaken, poor people’s chances, give them access to the market (and especially the formal market) and strive to include them as the market moves
through its inevitable cycles, both upward and downward. This is not an easy challenge to meet, but it should not be ignored any longer.

Urban economies that are not built on a stable land market are themselves unstable. City governance has to focus on building stability steadily and progressively, without losing sight of the final goal. Nor should pursuit of that goal blind us to the contradictions that inevitably emerge. Improving the rules and institutions that make up urban land market governance must at the same time build and strengthen the wide knowledge base. The more cities’ land markets are understood, the better can one design governance interventions that will achieve positive outcomes.

Building a system of urban land governance that includes most citizens and generates economic growth is not a futile objective, nor is it a grand gesture of the impossible in the face of insurmountable odds. It is a goal that can be achieved, but only through initiatives that are grounded in a pragmatic understanding of how markets in urban land work, what drives those markets, and how individual interventions are likely (or not) to result in particular market outcomes. However, this goal cannot be achieved by the wishful combination of earnest entreaties for more robust political will and simply hoping for the best. The dynamics of the land markets in all our cities show that a more nuanced, more incremental and, above all, a more patient approach is likely to produce the desired results.