Trading Places

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Trading Places recognises that the poor are highly active in the land market and that the prospects for change depend on taking their perspectives into account.

This book invites you to trade places, and to see urban land from a different point of view. It critiques commonly held assumptions about urban land markets and argues that the neo-classical understanding of land markets does not necessarily fit current practices on the African continent. In fact, large-scale interventions which aim to roll out title and assume that increasing land ownership leads to increased investment, productivity and wealth, simply miss how the majority of land users in African cities gain land security and invest in it.

While greater land security provides the conditions for higher levels of production and growth in wealth, it is critical to understand how ordinary urban dwellers acquire, hold, trade and mediate land. This reveals a new kind of land economics at work - one that is not a retrofit model of what has happened elsewhere, but operates according to a sophisticated, if fragile, economic logic.

Using evidence from work done by the Urban Land Markets Programme Southern Africa, the book presents a clear picture of how urban land markets work in African cities. It shows that the strict distinctions often made between the formal and informal urban land markets make little sense in the real world, and that interventions need to be designed to address the whole market and all urban inhabitants.

“Trading Places deepens the debate on access to land and provides valuable pointers to meeting these challenges. It should be required reading for development practitioners, particularly state officials. It expanded my understanding of the inventiveness and resilience of communities in their attempt to prosper in the cities.
Monty Nkosi, Governance Advisor, South African National Upgrading Support Programme

The developing world is urbanising fast. In the process new systems of urban land ownership, transfer and governance are also emerging - often from the bottom up. Understanding how these work, and how they interface with wider markets and with existing land governance regimes, is crucial to urban development that makes space for the poor. This book offers fascinating new insight into these dynamics.
Dr Kate Phillips, Programme Manager: Inequality and Economic Marginalisation, Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS)

This book was informed by the work of the Urban Land Markets Programme Southern Africa