



evidence-based policy in development network



Research-based evidence in African policy debates

Case study 1
Decongestion in Accra, Ghana

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June 2012

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to the staff at Participatory Development Associates, who were extremely flexible and accommodating during my stay in Accra. Special mention also must go to Franklin Obeng-Odoom at the Department of Political Economy, University of Sydney, who so kindly and consistently shared his thoughts on the issue of street hawking and evictions throughout the research process.

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Abbreviations

AMA	Accra Metropolitan Assembly
CBD	Central Business District
COHRE	Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EBPDN	Evidence-based Policy in Development Network
GNA	Ghana News Agency
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
ISSER	Institute for Social Statistics and Economic Research
NDC	National Democratic Convention
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NPP	New Patriotic Party
NRSC	National Road Safety Commission
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDA	Participatory Development Associates
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RAPID	Research and Policy in Development
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

About this study

The link between research and policy, which is increasingly occupying the interest of researchers, policymakers and practitioners alike, is a complex one. Policy is framed by the discursive context in which it is made: the wider debate in which a policy is positioned effectively determines it. In order to probe this discursive context and the role of research-based evidence in informing it, the Politics of Research-based Uptake in African Policy Debates research project, jointly funded by the Mwananchi programme and the Evidence-based Policy in Development Network (EBPDN) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), investigates the role of research-based evidence in four policy debates in Africa. The exploratory research is based on information gathered on four policy debates in four case study countries – Ghana, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia – during the period October 2010–November 2011.

Policy debates offer an entry point into the wider discursive practices at play within policymaking, and therefore a wider analytical snapshot than is made possible by focusing on the impact of a particular piece of research or tracing the formation of a particular policy, as other studies have done. Each case study aims to probe the ‘politics’ behind the role of research-based evidence in policy debates in Africa by posing the question: What factors affect the use of research-based evidence in African policy debates? It is not, however, the aim of this research to arrive at an explanatory model of research uptake in Africa; rather, the study is explorative and aims to provide an initial attempt to conceptualise 1) the role of research-based evidence in African policy debates; and 2) factors that account for or help to explain this role. Any answers will need to integrate initial reflections on how policy debates in Africa can themselves be characterised.

This study is informed by the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme’s work over the past 10 years. RAPID has systematically tried to identify how best to support and promote research-based evidence approaches for civil society actors to influence the policy process, guided by the belief that a policy informed by research-based evidence is better – and more effective – than one which is not. One of the central tenets of RAPID’s approach to policy influence is the recognition that political context matters when it comes to policymaking and, subsequently, so does whether, which (‘whose’?) and how research-based evidence is used. The RAPID approach holds that attempts to influence policy using research-based evidence must incorporate this insight in order to be able to best tailor their strategies to political realities.

This study is conceived of as a way of formulating action in Africa based on the realities of how policy debates are conducted and the role of research-based evidence in these, by potentially ‘going with the grain’ to support policy influence for pro-poor outcomes in the African contexts described. An understanding of the current state of policy debates in Africa is important, as it reflects national capacity to engage in deliberative dialogue, to construct logical arguments and to gather and use relevant and credible information to employ in critical analysis. In Africa, where political institutions do not enjoy the precedent they do in many western countries, and where educational levels are low, the notion and practice of policy ‘debate’ is likely to face challenges. Policy debates do not occur in isolation from the policy process: they provide a window into the ‘politics’ of policymaking.

Introduction

This paper presents the findings of the first EBPDN case study investigating the role of research-based evidence in policy debates in Africa. Overall, the research project is designed to inform subsequent thinking on how best to support evidence-based approaches in developing countries by 'going with the grain' with the reality of policymaking in Africa, rather than seeking to change the existing system from the outset.¹ The first task in this, however, is to establish what the 'grain' is in the context of evidence use and presentation in a policy debate.

This case study considers the policy debate surrounding the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) 'decongestion' of the Central Business District (CBD) in Accra, Ghana. Presented as a way of bringing order to a seemingly chaotic city centre, the mainstay of the policy debate surrounds the forced eviction of street hawkers from unsolicited spaces in the busiest areas of the capital. The debate has a long precedent in Ghana but has seen renewed impetus following the AMA's decision in July 2009 to introduce a more comprehensive crackdown on street hawking. The case study reveals the very different understandings of what 'evidence' constitutes in the formation of positions in a debate, revealing that additional research does not seem to play a part in a debate which relies principally on 'self-evident' evidence.

The case study is organised as follows. Section 1 presents the debated decongestion policy, its historical background and a summary of the principal arguments of key actors in the debate. Section 2 narrows in on the arguments the various parties present in order to ascertain the basis on which arguments are being made, with a focus on the types of evidence being used. The arguments in the policy debate are organised in accordance with their relation to four policy 'stages': problem identification; assessment of policy options; policy implementation; and monitoring, evaluation and learning.²

Section 3 explains the role of research-based evidence in the policy debate with recourse to three key factors affecting research uptake: how 'knowledge' is conceived in Ghana and how this relates to the importance of practical – rather than research-based – evidence in the debate; the relations between the various actors in the debate and how this has led to an 'us' and 'them'-style debate in which researchers have not involved themselves to any great extent; and the capacity of these actors with regard to the demand and supply of research-based evidence which, combined with the preceding factors, has meant the AMA has not demanded outside research-based evidence, nor – does it seem – has it utilised it. The concluding section draws together the case study's narrative by identifying the key findings to emerge and their relevance for influencing policy through research-based evidence.

Key findings

The debate on the eviction of street hawkers and the decongestion policy does not constitute a single discussion taking place in a unified policy space: we are not considering an adversarial-style exchange of arguments in which competing actors are forced to argue against each other. As a result, the evidence used is not largely 'like-for-like': tracing a linear conversation in which arguments are exchanged for counterarguments is impossible. Further, the debate is not organised around a common frame of reference: no overarching national urban policy framework exists. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, the debate is not characterised by a high level of research-based evidence in terms of either the formation or the articulation of a position or argument. The most 'research-heavy' aspect of the debate has been in relation to alternative policy options, although the level of the AMA's engagement with this is unclear.

1 See Kelsall (2008) for a detailed discussion of 'going with the grain' in African development.

2 This admittedly presents a simplified, 'linear' understanding of the policy process. The author recognises that the reality is far more complex, but uses this framework for the purposes of data organisation and presentation.

In terms of the role of research-based evidence in this debate, three major factors have been identified. The first relates to *attitudes and understandings of what 'knowledge' constitutes in Ghana*, which to a large extent explains the predominance of practical over research-based evidence in the debate. This is exemplified in the privileging of experience or everyday common 'knowledge' (which can also be gained orally or transmitted from one's predecessors), evidence which is taken to be obvious and – to an extent – beyond question, thus rendering the need for 'research-based' evidence unnecessary. As a result, the debate is at something of a standstill, and the scope for influencing the principal actors using research-based evidence is therefore extremely limited. In relation to this point, it is also important to highlight the large scope for unexamined assumptions, stereotypes, values and beliefs to condition the way everyday experience is perceived to influence the debate, given the significant role this recourse to 'experience' plays in forming and framing arguments.

Second, the debate is characterised by arguably *unproductive relations between key actors*, to the detriment of the use of research-based evidence. National-level government actors in the ministries and researchers seem reluctant to involve themselves, seeing the debate as something of a foregone conclusion and lessening the likelihood of communicating research-based evidence (should it exist) to the AMA. Further, because of the absence of a national urban policy, there is limited buy-in or scope for national-level government actors to formally align themselves with the AMA's decongestion policy. Importantly, urban issues are not at a premium. Meanwhile, donors in Ghana have little interest in what are 'local' problems. This has in turn affected the relationship between researchers and donors, who would normally be in a good position to try to broker relations between the research community and the AMA. To an extent, much of the blame can be placed on the AMA for being – or at least being seen to be – unwilling to engage with others. However, the extent to which researchers have been proactive in communicating with the AMA also needs to be questioned.

Third, and directly linking to the recourse to practical types of evidence and relational issues, is *the problem of capacity to supply, demand, understand and use research-based evidence across the board*. On the part of those who oppose decongestion, a number of factors constrain the supply of relevant research, including funding, a lack of experience and know-how to engage with the AMA, limited opportunities to communicate owing to difficult relations with the AMA and the language of the research itself, which does not 'fit' into the AMA's development priorities or seem to be grounded in the challenges of everyday reality the AMA is proceeding from. These arguments not only lack influence but also are, it would seem, largely dismissed.

In conclusion, it is argued that the biggest hindrance to the use of research-based evidence in the debate is the weaknesses of the AMA itself. This is not surprising for a local government institution, even though it relates to the capital city of one of the continent's 'stars'. An instrumental factor here is that the AMA has not communicated the rationale behind the eviction of street hawkers beyond a number of short statements in the media. This means its actions are – not without grounds – viewed as a discriminatory 'attack' which lacks an evidence base. The tone of the debate is therefore set: a lack of research-based evidence begets a lack of research-based evidence from other actors in the debate.

Methodology

The purpose of this case study is to generate evidence on the role of research-based evidence by pursuing an innovative line of enquiry which considers a polarised policy debate and asks the following questions:

What arguments are being made and by whom, and how they are communicated?
How can the role of research-based evidence – or other forms of evidence – be accounted for in these arguments?

The research undertaken for this case study occurred during the period September–November 2010, over a two-week research trip to Accra in October during which the author was based at Participatory Development Associates (PDA). This particular debate was selected on account of the polarised positions involved, the media's extensive coverage of the issue and the opportunity to consider how a local authority engages with and uses evidence. While the debate is undoubtedly 'local' (i.e. under the remit of the AMA), the issues it presents are relevant to all of Ghana's urban areas undergoing similar decongestion exercises.

The manner in which the case study was undertaken is explorative: there is no existing theory this research is attempting to prove or disprove (see Thomas and James, 2006). The findings are therefore presented tentatively, based on recognition that there is much in this paper that may require revision, further reflection and greater input from the parties concerned. The research methodology consisted of the following:

Review of media items

Media articles appearing in the period January 2006–November 2010 were collected online and in hard copy, largely from Ghana's most prominent newspapers and radio stations, such as The Chronicle, Peace FM and Joy FM.

Review of the literature

The literature on this subject is not vast, but a number of key documents were gathered prior to the research trip. These included relevant development plans, statements of opposition to certain decongestion activities and a number of research outputs by researchers working on urban policy issues. Three research papers were collected during and after the research trip.

Interviews

The research was principally informed by 31 individuals, 24 of which were 'key' informant interviews using semi-structured (14) or structured (12) formats. The remaining five constituted the PDA team, who participated in a focus group in which initial findings were presented.³ Bar two 'interviews' conducted via email, face-to-face interviews were undertaken in Accra. Given the nature of the research and the key informants, most of the interviews were conducted in naturalised working environments (offices, roadsides, market areas). The case study therefore incorporates a strong element of naturalistic observation incorporated.

The institutional affiliations of the interviewees fell into the following categories: donor organisation (1); private sector workers (including 'legal' market traders) (4); street hawkers (3); journalists (2); government (10); research/academic (3); and non-governmental organisation (NGO)/development consultancy (7).

In terms of prior information regarding decongestion and the eviction of street hawkers, the case study is also informed by numerous conversations with Ghanaians in the period 2006–7 during which time the author was residing in Ghana.

1 Decongestion of the Central Business District, Accra

This section briefly presents the AMA's decongestion policy 2009, its historical context, its relationship with wider issues of urbanisation and the main actors involved in the debate.

³ See Annex 1 for a full list of interviewees.

1.1 The policy issue

The AMA's commitment to decongestion is not contained in one policy document; however, in accordance with our operational definition, it constitutes a 'policy'. Specifically, 'decongestion' refers to the AMA's programme of activities launched on Monday 2 July 2009 to decongest the CBD of Accra by means of removing unsolicited or 'illegal' structures and hawkers. This paper's scope has been narrowed to focus only on the eviction of street hawkers, although the wider issue of the government of Ghana's policy towards informal housing is recognised.

Indeed, the eviction of street hawkers cannot be understood without an appreciation of the wider formal/informal dynamic in rapidly growing urban areas such as Accra and, to some extent, the policy debate surrounding the eviction of street hawkers encompasses this wider context. For the purposes of this paper, however, 'decongestion' should be read as referring to the eviction of street hawkers from the city's CBD.

Decongestion is reportedly based on a three-month Action Plan,⁴ in which the exercise was intended, according to AMA Chief Executive Alfred Vanderpuje, to bring 'sanity' to the capital by improving traffic congestion and allowing the conditions for 'meaningful development' to take place (Myjoyonline, 2009). By providing street hawkers with alternatives in the form of newly created market areas (e.g. Odawna Market, known as the 'pedestrian mall' at Nkrumah Circle, northwest of the city centre),⁵ the AMA foresees that it will rid the streets of informal sector workers – both 'static' hawkers who have set up illegal stalls outside of designated market areas and 'mobile' hawkers, who remain on foot – by formalising them.⁶ This is not an unusual occurrence in Ghana – the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) operates a similar policy – nor is the removal of street hawkers particular to Ghana. Similar attempts to decongest urban areas have been made in other African countries, such as Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia, with differing degrees of success.

After nine days, the decongestion exercise slowed as a result of the intervention of then-Regional Minister Nii Armah Asietey, who protested that his office had not been informed of the 15 June 2009 deadline. The 'battle-ready' AMA declared it would instead educate hawkers on the hazards of street hawking. However, by 29 June, the demolition of 'illegal' trading stalls was taking place during the night, and July saw the infamous burning of stalls along the Spintex Road in readiness for US President Barack Obama's first visit to Africa after assuming office. By August 2009, decongestion was progressing well, according to the AMA, although the issue of some task force members using their position to collect bribes and fake ticketing was discussed (AMA, 2009b).

Large-scale exercises were carried out in December 2009 and April 2010, well beyond the initial three-month plan, and the AMA Taskforce is now a permanent fixture in busy commercial areas such as Tudu Station, Makola and Nkrumah Circle. In March 2011, the AMA announced that new by-laws had been passed to enable the arrest of anyone buying from a street hawker outside of designated areas from April 2011. Drivers of vehicles are also to be held responsible for passengers patronising street hawkers (Citifmonline, 2011).

The decision to undertake the decongestion exercise, a renewed attempt to achieve what the previous National Patriotic Party (NPP) government had tried – and seemingly failed – to

4 This has not been made available to the author as yet.

5 The market is also known as 'Tibiodom'.

6 Research by Iyenda (2005) identifies two modes of hawking in Accra: itinerant, or walking, and stationary, or fixed. Itinerant hawkers – who constituted 58.3% of the hawker population investigated – included shoe repairers/polishers, sellers of a wide variety of items such as fruit (oranges, pineapples, pawpaw, bananas, avocados), bread, newspapers, magazines, stationery, drinking water in sachets, herbal drugs, cooked food, detergents, soaps and clothing (new and used). Stationary hawkers (41.7% of the sample) sell items such as VCD/DVD players and films, phone cards, mobile phone accessories, plastic wares, cooking utensils, used clothing, cooked food, roasted plantain, fruit and vegetables. They also offer other services such as telephone systems (known as 'space to space' in Ghana), carpentry and vehicle repair. Asiedu and Mensah (2008) further reveal no major differences in the commodities sold within the study sites.

achieve, was taken by the AMA in May 2009 (AMA, 2009a) in order to enforce AMA by-laws.⁷ The decision followed a fiercely fought election at the end of 2008 between the National Democratic Convention (NDC) – the eventual winners – and John Kufor’s NPP. The NDC’s decision to embark on decongestion again, in spite of vehement opposition to the NPP’s eviction of street hawkers during its election campaign in both Accra and Kumasi, is a matter of interest in Ghana’s public discourse, not least because the NPP’s previous efforts to decongest the city were seen to have failed.

Although decongestion is headed by Mayor of Accra Alfred Vanderpuje, the impetus to undertake the exercise ultimately lay with President Atta Mills. The mayor is an unelected figure appointed by the president, meaning there is a degree of criticism about the former’s ability to act in the best interests of the citizens of Accra. It also means the mayor does not fear the biting hand of the ballot box: his/her tenure is for four years only. This has led to the popular belief that the AMA is ‘above’ persuasion by any actor other than the president.⁸

The AMA was established in 1963 and is one of 6 decentralised metropolitan assemblies which, along with municipal and district assemblies, enjoy a degree of decision-making power away from the central government.⁹ Like most decentralised authorities, the AMA is thought to be under-funded and under-resourced, meaning resource mobilisation is a perennial concern (Obeng-Odoom, 2010).

At street level, decongestion is implemented by the AMA Taskforce, headed by Joseph Nii Okai, with support from the National Police and Fire Services. This has principal responsibility for enforcing the AMA’s decisions, acting as the daily ‘face’ of both the AMA and decongestion. The Taskforce does not have the power to arrest or detain, but is mandated to ‘remove’ and ‘confiscate’ street hawkers and their goods.

A number of ministries are (in theory) involved in supporting decongestion, technically, financially or both. The main actors are the Ministry for Local Government and Rural Development, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Roads and Highways. Decongestion has assumed connections with a number of national action plans, and is a key tool in realising the AMA’s city development plan. However, the absence of a national urban policy means decongestion does not form part of any integrated attempts to address the problems resulting from Accra’s increasing urbanisation.

The most comprehensive statement of decongestion can be found a number of years ago in the 1992–3 Accra Central Area Development Plans. Decongestion here constituted two strategies: 1) relocating ‘non-conforming activities’ and replacing them with new investment opportunities; and 2) creating new urban ‘centres’ to decentralise the focus of commercial, political and business activity in one area.

This is in keeping with the AMA’s current development priorities, of which easing congestion in the CBD is thought to be a key way of improving service and commerce in the capital (AMA, n.d.). In its most general sense, indirect references to decongestion can be found in the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) 2006–9, where traffic congestion is highlighted as a problem in urban areas. Explicit references to or documents concerning decongestion are not evident.

7 At an estimated cost – some of which the AMA hoped to raise from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development – of over \$150,000 (AMA, 2009a).

8 See Obeng-Odoom (2009): ‘So mayors in Ghana are accountable to central government, its agents, and private businesses (which may fund the activities of central government). It is therefore difficult to escape the conclusion that mayors in Ghana are not ‘public servants’, but simply ‘agents’ of private and state capital.’

9 According to the AMA (2005), in Kooijman (2010), the AMA is ‘the highest political authority mandated to govern the Accra metropolitan area and to provide basic infrastructure and services to support the social economic development [and has a] staff strength of 2.131, broken down into senior management, middle management, skilled staff and unskilled staff’.



Sign prohibiting street hawking outside Kinbu Gardens, central Accra.
Source: Author (2010).

1.2 Historical context

This debate is by no means new. Attempts to clear the CBD of street hawkers can be traced back to previous initiatives, making this policy debate a recurring one. The AMA started a decongestion exercise under the previous NPP government in February 2005 to remove petty traders and hawkers (as well as beggars and 'lunatics') from the CBD, as well as illegal structures. The exercise was halted because of a lack of alternative trading places, and subsequently the construction of an alternative market structure began.

In January 2007, the AMA introduced the Jubilee Cleanup, involving the removal of street hawkers and the demolition of illegal roadside structures (which were often used as both living and work areas). The prospect of visiting foreign dignitaries at the celebration of 50 years of Ghana's independence from colonial rule was the motivation behind this, much like that of President Obama's visit two years later. This second phase of the exercise had slightly more success. Hawkers were required to relocate to permanent stalls at Odawna Market and other 'legal' satellite markets (GNA, 2007). Taskforce members removed those vending inside or outside the market, which could house up to 4,000 traders, without having purchased a stall.¹⁰ The relocation was thought to have cost the AMA GH¢181,488.60 (over \$125, 000). In the run-up to the 2008 election, the AMA's efforts to remove hawkers abated somewhat, however.

The decongestion of the CBD did not begin with the NPP, though: under Jerry Rawlings, the previous NDC government had been concerned with easing the pressure on public walkways and bringing order to the city. In 1991, street hawkers from the city centre had been relocated to Old Fadama (in the Agbobloshie area), known as Ghana's worst slum area. The problems

¹⁰ According to an interviewee who is part of the AMA's management team at Odawna Market, the purchasing of a stall at the market consists of a four-year renewable ownership. The obtaining of permits in other non-market areas, such as lorry parks, involves the purchasing of a permit which is paid each month. Taxes on traders are also collected from the National Revenue Service and the AMA.

facing existing residents and relocated hawkers worsened in 1993 when the yam market was also relocated from the centre into the same area, bringing large numbers of traders with it.

Indeed, the street hawking issue and the need to decongest Accra reflects wider problems associated with urbanisation. Accra is a rapidly growing city which must meet the needs not only of its 'indigenous' population but also increasing numbers of migrants who – facing abject poverty in rural areas of Ghana – seek a better life in the country's urban centres. In spite of this, Ghana is thought to suffer from a lack of a comprehensive national urban development policy making the required links between the various areas of concern (road traffic, land, housing, migration, health, sanitation, infrastructure, the informal economy, the environment). A draft National Urban Policy is in the pipeline under the guidance of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development.

According to the World Bank (2007), the capital's population grew twofold over the period of 15 years leading up to 2007. Correspondingly, its area increased from 133 km² in 1990 to 344 km² in 2005, and population density decreased significantly, from 14,000 persons per km² to 8,000 persons per km² over the same period. In spite of this, informal housing remains both a way of life for many residents in Accra and an attractive option for those who cannot afford formal housing.¹¹ It is estimated that 45% of Ghana's urban population lives in slums¹² (UN-Habitat, 2009).

Moreover, this figure is rising – UN-Habitat (2004) figures suggest the rate of slum formation in Ghana is 1.83%. Meanwhile, about 85% of the active population in Ghana works in the informal economy, and about 60% of these work in cities and towns (ICFTU, 2004, in Obeng-Odoom, 2011a). The high rate of informal workers has been attributed to Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s (Aryeetey Bortei-Doku et al., 2009), resulting in large public sector job losses and effectively creating a new generation of informal workers – in particular street hawkers selling foodstuffs, water and dog chains (Obeng-Odoom, 2011a), as well as informal labourers and providers of other services.¹³ It should be noted that Ghana's informal sector existed well before the economic reforms of the 1980s, however.

Although one study of the household characteristics of Accra's informal workers suggests that 60% of them actually live in rented accommodation rather than informal settlements (Asiedu and Mensah, 2008), it is generally thought they live in informal housing. In Accra, it is estimated that about 60% of the population both live and work in slum areas such as Nima and Agbobloshie (Grant and Nijman, 2004 in Aseidu & Agyei-Mensah, 2008). The informal economy and informal housing are very difficult to separate; indeed, the government of Ghana's policies towards both have been seen as a full-scale attack on anything or anyone deemed 'informal' (e.g. Obeng-Odoom, 2011a), which largely equates to 'the illegal' and 'the poor'.

1.3 Key actors in the debate

The government of Ghana

The bottom line, for both the national government and the AMA, is the law. Street hawking (both mobile and static) is a violation of Ghanaian zoning, tax and road traffic laws. Decongestion is therefore supported by various national-level actors such as the Ministry of Roads and Highways and the National Revenue Authority out of a responsibility to

¹¹The 'informal' can be understood as that which is not part of accepted order, rules and norms. It therefore contains an element of value judgement (the 'formal' is thought to be more desirable than the 'informal') and is often associated with illegality. However, the informal sector consists of its own formalised order, rules and norms, making hard-and-fast distinctions problematic.

¹² UN-Habitat (2003) defines slums as residential areas that lack adequate access to water and sanitation and security of tenure, and that have poor structural quality of housing and insufficient living areas.

¹³ As suggested, distinguishing between the formal and the informal is difficult. There is significant overlap between the informal and formal economies, for instance street hawkers are supplied by formal businesses, and formal consumers often patronise the providers of informal services.

operationalise and enforce national laws. Publicly, President Atta Mills has endorsed the AMA's decision to evict street hawkers, although there have been rumours of disquiet over the policy among national government figures.

The AMA's position is also based on AMA by-laws, which it wants to enforce. In expressing the need for decongestion, members of the AMA have also tended to use impassioned language to describe the problem of street hawkers by making explicit links between their existence and many of the city's problems. Removing street hawkers is presented as a necessary step in Ghana's development towards middle-income country status, as this paper discusses later on.

The face of the AMA is the Taskforce teams who are charged with carrying out evictions and confiscating goods. Despite several incidences of violence between Taskforce members and street hawkers, Taskforce members are seemingly proud of their job¹⁴

Street hawkers and market traders

There is no official street trader 'position' on decongestion, although it is fairly obvious the policy is not supported on a number of grounds. First, some hawkers argue that street hawking is a tradition and cannot simply be eradicated: the fact that it exists is 'evidence' that it should. This links to the argument that the AMA is persecuting not only the profession but also the individuals: the AMA is thought to be arbitrarily attacking hawkers' workplaces and homes in order to eradicate not only hawking but also hawkers. The dynamic is seen as principally one between the 'rich' and the 'poor', but also, in some cases, between the 'rich' and the 'poor migrant'. This does not mean there are similar dynamics between street hawkers themselves, however.

Meanwhile, street hawkers have expressed dissatisfaction with the alternatives made available to them by the AMA. Designated market areas to accommodate former street hawkers are seen to lack patronage because of their distance from the roadside and because they possess inadequate facilities. Relocation is also unpopular because it disrupts relations within communities that formerly traded near to their homes. Support to alternative policy options, such as on the provision of new skills training, has been expressed. Lastly, street hawkers have articulated anger at the AMA's brutal approach to decongestion. In some cases, this has been manifestly expressed in the shape of violence towards Taskforce members.

NGOs

Decongestion is not popular among the NGO community, which largely approaches the issue from a rights-based point of view. A number of reasonably high-profile NGOs with international support – such as Amnesty International, People's Dialogue on Human Settlements, the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), the Ghana Federation for the Urban Poor and Shack/Slum Dwellers International – have argued against decongestion on the basis that forced eviction is against provisions made in a number of international human rights mechanisms, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. They have challenged some forced evictions through the courts. It should be noted that the principal concern for these NGOs, however, is forced eviction from slum dwellings rather than the eviction of street hawkers.

The media

The media's position in general reflects and echoes (as well as feeds and perpetuates) the public's attitude towards street hawkers as a 'nuisance' 'hijacking' roads (The Patriot, 2009) from both drivers and pedestrians alike. However, a degree of criticism is directed towards the AMA with regard to perceived immorality or wrongdoing (e.g. in reported cases of the

14 Author's field data.

Taskforce's mishandling of street hawkers), and when the AMA is thought to lack the capacity to follow through with decongesting the city.

Researchers

The research community in Ghana tends to view decongestion as an inextricable part of a wider urbanisation problem which the government of Ghana has been slow to address through a comprehensive urban policy framework. It is argued that, as a result, decongestion has attacked the symptoms of Accra's urban poverty rather than its causes. This approach is thought to be inadequate and ultimately doomed to failure. On this basis, there is also a degree of questioning with regard to the current government's ability to identify lessons to draw from previous attempts to rid the city of street hawkers. Research has been undertaken and presented by professional groups such as the Centre for Cycling Expertise and by the Ghana Institute of Planners. Both groups locate street evictions within a wider failure of the AMA to address the causes of congestion in Accra.

Other interest groups

It has not been possible to consider in any great detail the wide range of other interest groups with some bearing on the debate. However, a number of interest groups can be identified which stand to gain if decongestion is successful, such as taxi drivers and formal market traders who possess stalls or shops in areas frequented by street hawkers: street hawking represents a loss of revenue for these groups. Other groups support decongestion not for profit-based reasons, but because they believe less congested roads will improve the environment and free the roads for the use of bicycles.

It should be noted that the relationship between market traders and street hawkers is complicated: they cannot be separated into a simple dichotomy. For instance, street hawkers are often supplied by shop and stall owners and therefore play an important part in the formal value chain.

Donors

Major donors, such as the World Bank and the UK Department for International Development (DFID), have not engaged directly in the decongestion debate and therefore cannot be said to have developed any particular 'line' in response to the eviction of street hawkers. DFID Ghana's governance advisor, who is not familiar with the policy, has said that DFID's approach would be to analyse the situation using DFID's Empowerment Framework. Ultimate respect should be accorded to the law, however.

2 Framing the policy debate: what arguments are being used?

This section takes four aspects of the policy process – 1) identification of the problem; 2) assessment of policy options; 3) implementation; and 4) monitoring, evaluating and learning – in order to examine the positions of the various actors in the debate and the way these are articulated.

2.1 Identifying the problem

A key finding is that that street hawkers appear simultaneously in two ways within the policy debate: they are at once identified as a problem to be addressed in and of themselves and as a major causal factor of wider problems relating to road traffic and sanitation, of which their

eviction is merely a means to a greater end. This results in two simultaneous debates which pertain to two different policy problems.

In order to make clear what is meant by an unclear problem definition on the part of the government of Ghana, this section presents the two (interrelated) debates which are taking place: one which centres on the existence of street hawkers as a problem in itself, the other on a causal link between street hawkers and the wider problem of congestion in the CBD, as the AMA (n.d.) and the government (GoG, 2006) recognise in their development plans. On this basis, George Owuso of the Institute for Social Statistics and Economic Research (ISSER) posits that, before we can talk about the decongestion debate, we must first question what is meant by the term 'decongestion' and what purpose it is there to serve.

The 'problem' of hawkers

A principal characteristic of this debate is that it is framed by an unfavourable attitude and negative discourse surrounding 'the hawker', largely seen as a member of a homogenous entity variously described in the Ghanaian media as a 'nuisance', a 'menace' and a 'threat'. For instance, speaking at the launch of the Education Campaign on Decongestion and Sanitation Exercise in Accra in 2009, the chief executive of the AMA emphasised that the authority was simply enforcing its by-laws in order to 'stem indiscipline and lawlessness and make the city governable and healthy to live in' (GNA, 2009c). The restoration of order, the removal of 'dirt' and the eradication of anything deemed dangerous is indeed an integral part of the psyche of the social human (e.g. Douglas, 2002 [1966]), and this overarching framework serves to mobilise public support for the AMA's actions and arguably further damage the image of street hawkers in the public's collective consciousness.¹⁵

Hawkers, and their dwelling places, are thought to be unsanitary, unclean and ill-befitting a country that is aiming for middle-income status in the near future. One informant opined that,

Our leaders want to be like white men and live in white cities. Most of them want to live in the United States or Norway, where everything is clean. They cannot look their own country in the eye [...] they want to pretend that they [the country they inhabit] are clean, too.

Indeed, one government worker explained that decongestion was about addressing not just street hawking but also their 'whole system of life'. That street hawking is not always safe for women in particular comes out of previous research by Kwankye et al. (2008), who found that street hawkers are more likely than others to engage in high-risk sexual practices, and that 30% of female hawkers interviewed have suffered sexual harassment while hawking.

One criticism, therefore, is that, by acting as gardeners in a 'gardening state', the AMA is trying to create the illusion of a developed country city, or at least what is thought of as a developed country city. In doing so, the government of Ghana is overlooking pressing socioeconomic problems which are perpetuated in Accra's melting pot of sprawling urban settlements and informal workers. One static hawker at Tudu Station explained that,

They [the AMA] do not care about us having good places to live and work. The places are not good and I know this, I see this. What they want is that we go somewhere else for our business and leave their area clean. They do not mind us or how we live [...] only that we are not there at their side.

That street hawkers perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of city planning based on aesthetics is significant not only from a social development perspective but also in terms of their scope for challenging the AMA. Hawkets are put in a position where their form of rebuttal is either to defend their humanity (done largely by NGOs on their behalf) or to defend their perceived inhumanity in ways that do little to alter public perception of them.

¹⁵ Douglas writes that 'dirt is essentially disorder [...] it exists in the eye of the beholder [...] In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea'.

The media and the general public are largely critical of street hawkers, despite frequently patronising them to buy items such as foodstuffs, water sachets and ice cream. Street hawkers have a reputation for being volatile, angry and rude, and are often referred to as a homogenous collective explicitly linked with a particular dwelling area – ‘an eyesore’ which ‘breeds criminals and anti-social elements’ such as illicit sex, drugs, crime, robbers, prostitutes, child labourers and violence (The Standard, 2006, in Obeng-Odoom, 2011a). While undoubtedly casting street hawkers in a wholly negative light, what this argument also emphasises the wider vulnerabilities many street hawkers encounter as members of slum settlements who both live and work in the same area.

While the eviction of street hawkers is seen as desirable for the very reasons cited above, others assert that the social costs of decongestion are worse than those incurred by accepting the continued presence of hawkers in the CBD. For instance, Dadzie (2009b) argues that,

‘You destroy their small businesses and you force them into ventures that cause all sorts of problems for the society. They would go into armed robbery, prostitution and all other sorts of criminal activities that will create a greater nuisance for us all. The social cost of the so-called decongestion exercise is, therefore, worse than the minor inconvenience of the hawkers’ presence on the pavements.’

The socioeconomic impact of decongestion, such as loss of revenue and forced entry into more dangerous livelihood options, is not thought to be a particular concern of the AMA given that its principal reference point is the enforcement of its by-laws. This is in spite of evidence suggesting that Ghana’s urban economy plays a pivotal role in reducing poverty and unemployment (Asiedu and Mensah, 2008) and economic growth (World Bank, 2007). Indeed, according to Minister of Employment and Social Welfare Stephen Kwao, the informal economy contributes approximately 40% of the country’s national income (GNA, 2010).

The AMA would argue that, rather than denying street hawkers an opportunity to access the market, it is working to help street hawkers by enabling them to formalise their activities in designated market areas. This is based on the belief that street hawkers and their families should join ‘normal development patterns’ that, according to one ministry official, include access to formal health services such as vaccinations. It is argued that, without regulating hawkers within designated areas, the government will not be able to address issues of inclusion and a lack of access to service.

Solving congestion by removing street hawkers

In this set of arguments, the relationship between street hawking and another variable is at the heart of the debate. It is thought that street hawking is a major contributing factor to traffic congestion, road accidents and sanitation problems, the counter to which is that there are other contributing factors involved in creating such problems which could serve as equally beneficial policy entry points. Again, this is framed in terms of Ghana’s national development discourse, in which Accra is the key indication of its progress.

Traffic congestion in Accra is a much-lamented problem. It is also being directly connected to the presence of street hawkers, which is thought to result in the slowing of cars both to buy the hawkers’ goods and to avoid hitting hawkers and/or pedestrians. Specific data on this issue are not known to exist, but practical evidence has led to the inference that hawking contributes to Accra’s congestion. Further, in relation to the road safety aspects of the ‘pro-decongestion’ argument, the National Road Safety Commission (NRSC) estimates that 67% of road accidents in Ghana occur in urban areas (World Bank, 2007); according to Chris Appiah of the Ministry of Roads and Highways, Ghana’s road traffic laws are also based on the ‘fact’ that street hawking increases the likelihood of a road traffic accident given the hawker and/or pedestrian’s proximity to the road. This evidence is thought to exist but is not readily quotable or located.

Publicly, the mayor places blame on hawkers for traffic accidents by compelling pedestrians to walk on streets (AMA, 2011).

More immediate and personal evidence is provided in the form of media reports, such as that of Duh (2004), who recounts his personal experiences with street hawkers. The report is critical of the dangers street hawkers pose to road safety, and is supported by survey evidence by Kwankye et al. (2008) that indicates that a high number of street hawkers surveyed had been involved in or had witnessed a road accident involving other hawkers one month before. Again, the government describes decongestion as having a protective function as hawkers are at increased risk of injury.

Aesthetics would appear to play a large part in explaining the AMA's commitment to decongestion, in the belief that it will create a better living environment for Accra's citizens. The large amounts of waste that can be found at numerous hawking spots around the CBD are a central justification for their removal from central areas. For instance, Minister for Employment and Social Affairs Stephen Kwao laments the lack of progress made in the Korle Lagoon dredging project (at a cost of €5,000 per day), hindered by pollution from nearby informal settlements and trading areas (GNA, 2010b). The unmanageable amount of rubbish generated by street hawkers was also cited by two Taskforce member stationed in the Tema Station/Kinbu area as the principal reason they were evicting them. However, these respondents could not say whether the rubbish was generated only by street hawkers or was a general characteristic of any busy commercial area, with or without hawkers.

To a certain degree, the AMA has implicitly accepted that the blame for waste generation cannot be laid at the feet of street hawker in its entirety: by creating new by-laws criminalising the buying of goods from street hawkers, the AMA can be viewed as having developed and operationalised this recognition by admitting that the source of waste creation also lies with consumers. However, others have gone further, arguing not only that street hawkers are not the only culprits but also that the problem actually lies with the AMA and its failure to manage the city's waste (Dadzie, 2009b).

Development, discrimination and 'beautification'

Although it may be generally recognised and accepted even among supporters of decongestion that many of the city's problems cannot be attributed only to street hawkers, the public discourse does not offer much scope for such nuanced considerations. The propensity to associate street hawkers with all things undesirable and 'backward', coupled with a public desire to embrace all that is seen as 'developed', has meant quick and simple links have been made between the existence of hawkers and that which obstructs Ghana's vision of itself as the fast-progressing 'Black Star' of the African continent. The depersonalised language of decongestion serves to further dehumanise street hawkers and treat them as participants in a curious experiment, argued one unnamed informant in the research community.

In contrast with the technical nature of the decongestion as a practical solution to a problem, the language deployed to mobilise support for the 'beautification' of Accra in general invokes a religious sentiment which derives from an overall attitude towards Ghana's development. For instance, in a speech to the AMA describing how the capital had been selected to become a Millennium City, Chief Executive Alfred Vanderpuje equated Accra's development with leaving the 'old ways of doing things' behind, calling on 'the help of God' to help the AMA achieve 'A New Accra for a Better Ghana' (GNA, 2009b).

Historically, the discourse surrounding the cleanliness of Accra would certainly seem to fit into this trajectory. In one rallying cry to the public to help clean the city in 2004, former Mayor Stanley Nii Adjiri Blankson declared that 'cleanliness is next to Godliness' (GNA, 2004). It is telling that the two major slums in the market area of Agbobloshie are known as 'Sodom and Gomorrah' – an explicit reference to two Biblical cities destroyed by God in the Old Testament for their immorality. The quasi-religious fervour with which the AMA is – at least in public –

approaching decongestion had not gone unnoticed by interviewees. One street hawker described a situation of hypocrisy in which ‘men of God’ (the AMA) liked to ‘punish their own people’ because only they were ‘allowed to be blessed’.

The beautification of Accra – of which decongestion is a major part – can also be understood as a matter of *national* pride, bound up with the ‘mental health’ of the nation, in the words of Chris Appiah. It is also by no means a recent sentiment. In his famous description of the ruins of Ghana’s initial aspirations proclaimed at the dawn of independence, Ayei Kwei Armah – the country’s most renowned literary author – describes a ‘magnificent campaign’ mounted in the early years of independence, declaring ‘uncleanliness’ in the capital to be an ‘undesirable [...] evil’ that ‘must be eliminated’ (1969). That cleanliness is bound up with an arguably Christian discourse is reasonably clear, but this needs to be combined with an appreciation of national pride and aspirations for the nation’s development. Interestingly, this would suggest that the discourse is less donor-led and is actually an aspiration that is felt very closely by Ghanaians without extraneous pressure.

One major driver of the support to decongestion is what could be described as a national desire to present a good image to foreign visitors to the capital, reflected in the PRSP, which highlights tourism as a major sector to develop (GoG, 2006). This is not, it should be noted, specific to Ghana, and can be found in nearly all major cities in the world. As the capital city in the ‘Black Star’ of the sub-continent, Accra is on the ascendant, receiving numerous foreign dignitaries from the continent and outside, and is therefore keen to maintain, promote and capitalise on its status. This has been compounded by the international attention given to the country as a result of President Obama’s visit and the national football team’s success in the World Cup. The pressure on Accra to fit its current international billing is palpable, and also understandable.

This pressure has been particularly manifest before particular events that both bring foreign visitors to the capital and ensure Accra is the focus of international media attention. Interviewees and a number of informants agreed that evictions of street hawkers increased before and during events such as Ghana’s hosting of the African Cup of Nations football tournament in 2008 and President Obama’s visit in 2009 (Obeng-Odoom, 2011a). In one infamous early morning raid on street hawkers and their dwellings, stalls at the Spintex Market leading into the CBD were set ablaze in order to ‘beautify’ in preparation for the US President’s visit (Myjoyonline, 2009). However, Celia Marshall, Co-director of PDA, pointed out that attributing decongestion to current events means ignoring the historical context in which the activities are borne out.

Two interviewees in opposition to the policy suggested that decongestion is attractive to the AMA, and Mayor Vanderpuje in particular, because it is a quick and (theoretically) easy ‘win’ for a body mandated to develop the Accra metropolis. As an unelected official, Vanderpuje is thought to provide a ‘buffer’ between complainants of the policy and the national government and has therefore, in the words of one unnamed informant working for the AMA, sometimes ‘taken liberties’ in implementing the decongestion policy. The same informant described Vanderpuje as a ‘very aesthetic’ man whose personal preferences have been a strong influence on how decongestion has manifested over the past 15 months.¹⁶

Street hawking as a ‘norm’

In much the same way that the AMA may not have deemed it necessary to reassess and reflect on decongestion in its previous incarnations, a similar attitude regarding street hawking as a ‘tradition’ is evident among street hawkers and wider members of the public alike: according to Chris Appiah of the Ministry of Roads and Highways, street hawking has become a norm for many people, both for hawkers and for those who have grown up in Accra (and other cities and

16 That is, until November 2010.

towns). This is reflected in some media reports. For instance Dadzie (2009a) argues 'we've lived with it for decades and it's hard to see why the mayor wants to change it'.

While some see it as harmless, others view the acceptance of street hawking as a part of Ghanaian culture as masking its negative effects, leading to a downplaying of what is a dangerous social ill. Here, we are reminded of Chabal's (2004) reflections on legitimacy in Africa: 'Based on empirical evidence, it is clear that what is apparently illegal, for example smuggling, or even more, what is clearly illegal, such as the embezzlement of state funds, is often seen in Africa as legitimate, completely legitimate by those who benefit from it.'

Although street hawking can by no means be equated with the systematic embezzlement of public funds so readily associated with the continent's 'big men', the idea here is that, even with the knowledge that something is illegal, it can retain its claims to 'rightness' in a way that often questions the logic of the original prohibition.

However, according to Chris Appiah, resistance (in the form of behaviour) is nothing to do with 'serious evidence' or intended logic but is a reaction to the proposed changing of social habits. Another interviewee contracted by the AMA agreed, saying that,

We Ghanaians are very traditional – we will defend anything that we think is ours. Those who have little will defend with even greater force. They defend the change above anything else.

However, in the eyes of the hawkers, the very fact they exist acts as a form of evidence of its (and thereby their) 'rightness'. This logic could be restated as 'I do therefore I ought': because a person is a street hawker, this is what they should be. It would be illogical, therefore, to deny something which is seen as a natural state of affairs. For example, one female street hawker being reprimanded by a Taskforce member in the Makola Market area said she felt justified in 'fighting' for her place because,

This is what my mother did and it is what I have. How can you say it is not the correct thing when my mother did this? Was she not correct? If not for selling here I would not be here. So I should not exist?

When asked why the AMA was trying to remove her from the roadside, she answered that 'they [the AMA] want me to eat dirt.' Again, we see how street hawkers perceive themselves to be discriminated against and targeted by the government. In response, they recourse to the 'tradition' argument, bound up with a defence of their humanity.

2.2 Assessing the policy options

There is a sense that street hawkers are easy scapegoats amid deepening concerns over Accra's road and sanitation problems in the CBD. The perspectives converge around the recognition of congestion as a problem, but one not served in the long term by evicting street hawkers. It is seen as a superficial attempt to redress a problem which reflects the over-centralisation of financial and political areas in the CBD and an insufficient transport and road network. If the existence of street hawkers and their dwellings is the problem, and their removal is an end in itself, then the arguments of a number of Ghanaian researchers regarding the need to understand the causes of hawking and offer viable alternatives to street hawking becomes paramount; if the eviction of street hawkers is only a *means* to an end (such as clear roads and an improved environment), then alternative policy options could be considered.

In mapping out the subsequent policy options presented as viable alternatives to decongestion as it stands, this section arguably presents the most 'research-heavy' set of arguments

encountered in the policy debate. Interestingly, these would not appear to have been met with a response by the government.¹⁷

Understanding street hawkers

According to Boadi-Danquah (2009), 'Accra can never be decongested'. This suggests street hawkers are an inevitable part of Accra's landscape. In this case, the AMA is fighting a losing battle. However, if one argues – presumably along with the AMA – that street hawking can be 'eradicated', the importance of gathering more comprehensive data on street hawkers may be an important step in addressing what causes and sustains the adoption of street hawking as a livelihood. Ghana possesses a handful of scholars who have conducted work in this area, including George Owusu (ISSER) and Franklin Obeng-Odoom (University of Sydney).

Researchers in this area assert that street hawking in Ghana is caused by poverty (Kwankye et al, 2008; Ghana Institute of Planners, n.d.) but that disaggregated data on street hawkers, their households, communities and networks are lacking. This is particularly the case regarding the migrant status of street hawkers. Obeng-Odoom (2009) argues that the majority of street hawkers in Accra are migrants, a finding confirmed by Owusu et al. in their research in Nima (2008). However, Aseidu and Mensah (2008) found a higher proportion of indigenous inhabitants in their samples. In the area around Makola Market, there is a trend towards men becoming street hawkers as a result of a lack of jobs for young people, according to one street female hawker. This view is corroborated Overa (2007), who observed an increase in male trading activity in Accra.

The need to earn money for basic necessities is a common thread in the street hawkers' defence. An attack on their means of obtaining a living is therefore perceived as an attack on their person: the two are not divorced. In understanding this, Ghanaian researchers have argued that the government of Ghana's priorities are misplaced: in order to remove street hawkers, the government should focus on reducing their need to hawk (i.e. reducing poverty, improving employment and training opportunities, etc.). The Ghana Institute of Planners (n.d.) argues that hawking needs to be understood as 'an expression of an unmet demand for retail space in an economy that is skewed towards commerce'. Before attempting to do this, however, the government requires accurate demographic data on the street hawkers.¹⁸

As well as removing the *need* to hawk, it is also argued that the government could concentrate on removing the *means* of hawking (the goods sold). The diktats of the international political economy are thought to be significant: Ghana, like many other African countries keen to capitalise on the opportunities the globalised economy can offer, has been flooded by 'cheap imported goods' (Aryeetey Bortei-Doku et al., 2009) which need to be distributed rapidly and widely among the population.

A growing current of thought is therefore focusing on the role of international companies such as Pharmacia and Fan Milk (as well as other market traders and suppliers that distribute their goods for street hawkers to sell) in encouraging, sustaining and perpetuating street hawking and the need for hawkers to hawk, according to George Owusu of ISSER. In some cases, goods are purchased on credit at wholesale outlets or retail shops from well-established contacts (Iyenda, 2005), suggesting that the line between the formal and informal economy is very fine indeed. In this line of argument, therefore, the AMA's targeting of street hawkers only scratches the surface of a much wider problem of the hawkers' position in international and national trade systems.

17 To the best of the author's knowledge.

18 It is hoped that some of these data will be obtained as a result of the 2010 Census.

Viable alternatives

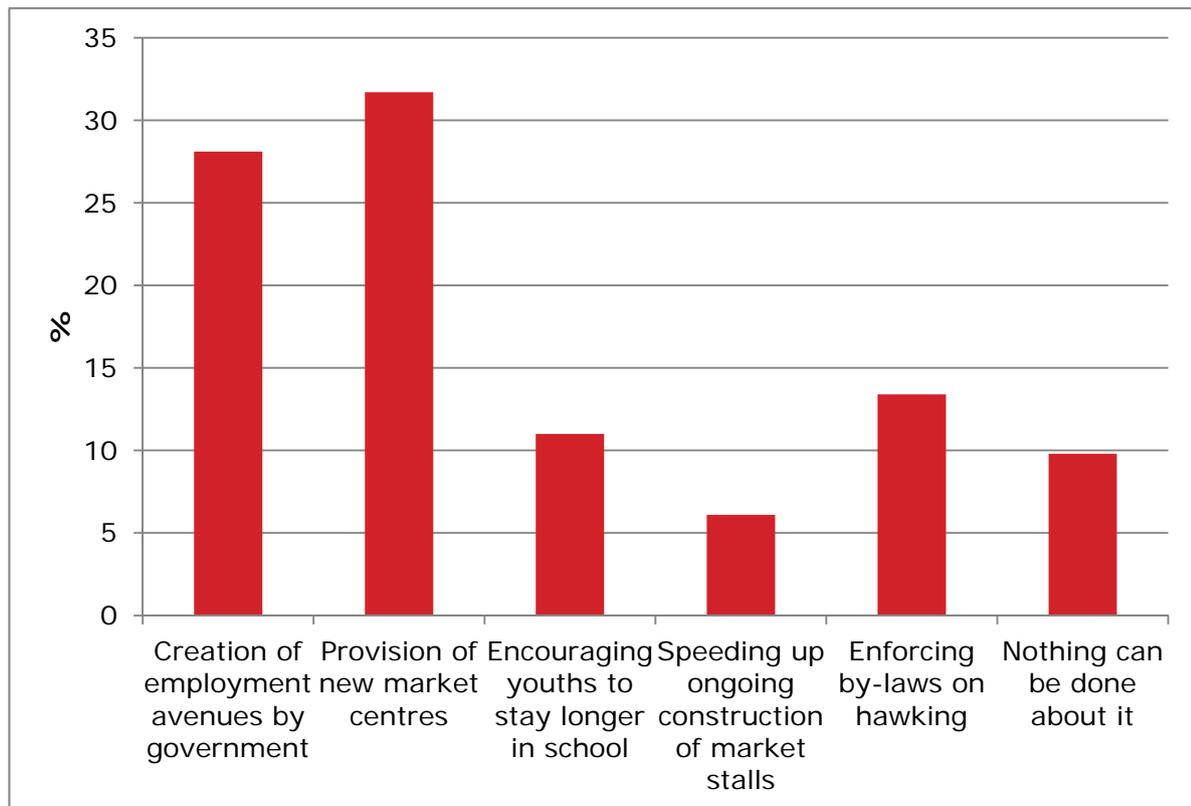
Two types of policy alternatives are presented in the decongestion policy debate, depending on what 'problem' decongestion is intended to solve: the first considers how to address street hawking; the second how to address the problem of traffic congestion and other environmental problems.

Alternatives relating to hawkers

In terms of alternative ways of targeting street hawkers for a 'Better Ghana', Asiedu and Mensah (2008) present a number of suggestions in their seminal work which analyses their 2006 survey of street hawkers in four areas of Accra: Nkrumah Circle, Kaneshie, Makola and Osu. When asked how best to decongest Accra, the provision of new market centres for street hawkers was the most popular suggestion (31.7% of respondents), with the provision of alternative employment following closely (28.1%) (see Figure 1). It is important not to overlook the relative lack of importance given to encouraging young people to stay in school (9% of respondents) and a more rapid introduction of market stalls in existing market areas (5%). It is interesting to note that nearly 10% of street hawkers surveyed thought the best way to decongest Accra was through the enforcement of by-laws. While this does not indicate that they support the enforcement of by-laws as the preferred policy option, it does suggest they may understand the legal basis for the decongestion policy.

Figure 1: Street hawkers' suggestions on the best way to decongest Accra

(% of respondents)



Source: Adapted from Asiedu and Mensah (2008).

The AMA's response would be that Odawna Market has now been constructed as an alternative trading area. However, the new market is not popular with street hawkers, who do not wish to relocate there. One explanation put forward by a number of informants (none of whom were

street hawkers) is that, given that many hawkers live and work in the same place – particularly those in unsolicited structures – relocating is not a simple procedure. The dynamics of hawking and trading communities are guided by complex rituals, exchanges and interactions based on mutual trust. In trying to manufacture new communities based on force rather than volition, the AMA is thought to be sowing the seeds for social unrest.

From the street hawkers' perspective, the new market is not well located and therefore does not attract customers. The problem is compounded by the lack of foodstuffs being sold there. According to one newspaper report, hawkers do not want to take up stalls at the pedestrian mall in Odawna because 'they [customers] cannot shop for foodstuffs until they go to the central market, so they will rather shop on the streets at the central market, to enable them buy their foodstuffs when they are going home' (Nelson, 2010).

Further, the market's infrastructure is thought to be unsatisfactory. Madam Victoria Mensah Tema (Station Market Queen) recently declared that street hawkers in the vicinity (herself included) would not relocate because the new market was an 'eyesore' which 'lacked proper lay-out' and is a 'flood-prone area' which in the rainy season sometimes leads to 'loss of lives and property' (in GNA, 2010a). It is not clear whether this claim can be substantiated by concrete evidence, however. Alas, hawkers have voted with their feet: according to the secretary of Odawna Market, some hawkers own market stalls at the new mall but lack of patronage inside the mall has led them to opt to sell outside the market. Others remain in their stalls but allegedly sell their wares by distributing them to street hawkers. Some argue further that the stalls are not affordable, and that to invest in a stall while potentially facing lower sales is too great a risk.

The AMA has urged the hawkers to relocate on several occasions, appealing for public support by arguing that it loses a daily revenue of over \$33,000) as a result of hawkers' reluctance to occupy the stalls at the new mall (Bessey, n.d.). The failure of street hawkers to make use of an area paid for with public money for the 'common good' of the country has led some media commentators to accuse them of being ignorant and foolish. Instead of changing their behaviour in a way conducive to Ghana's development, they are described as having 'decided to stick with what they were used to [...] regardless of all the negatives and the inconveniences that approach brought to the city and public' (Ablorh-Odjidja, 2009).

One of the main sticking points between the AMA and the street hawkers, therefore, is that, in accordance with international law, the AMA has provided the evictees with an alternative work place, but the majority of hawkers have refused this opportunity. In doing what is seen as foolish and somewhat 'backward', the public image of the street hawker is further denigrated.

Following the street hawkers' expressed interest in obtaining new employment opportunities, Asiedu and Mensah (2008) recommend interventions which offer avenues for self-improvement and thereby the reduction of vulnerability among street hawkers. The National Youth Employment Programme is cited as an existing example of the types of programmes that could be scaled up or better targeted in order to remove the need some young people have to hawk for their daily existence. The need for the AMA to offer substantive alternatives to street hawkers resonates with the view of a transport planner at the Ministry of Health, who argues for concrete incentives which serve to emphasise the potential gains street hawkers could have by complying with the AMA's by-laws rather than evidence of perceived personal or common risks.

As we have seen, currently the AMA's presentation of decongestion could be described as focusing too heavily on negative messages concerning dangers, hazards and overt moralising about the lifestyles of street hawkers. The articulation of a 'positive' message which emphasises the gains street hawkers stand to make as a result of decongestion is thought to be potentially more convincing for the hawkers. Here, influencing policy discourse and the use of research-based evidence are quite clearly not one and the same: while a particular

argument may be influential or persuasive, this does not mean it is based on research-based evidence.

Alternatives relating to traffic congestion

If getting rid of the street hawkers is not the purpose of decongestion, there may be alternative ways of achieving the AMA's policy goal. Interestingly, even figures in the government who support the eviction of street hawkers recognise that further measures will have to be taken in order to address the city's congestion problems. The implication here is that time, effort and financial resources are being deployed in an area which may produce little yield. Indeed, government employees suggested that street hawking is only 'one part' of Accra's traffic decongestion and that the following areas could be more fruitful areas of concentration for the AMA:

- Comprehensive reform of the city's roads to provide alternative road connections between different parts of the city;
- Decentralisation of the CBD in order to stem the flow of traffic from the outskirts of the centre to the CBD. This would include the reclassification of unused lands for other functions;
- Division of the CBD's functions by moving the commercial centres away from the centre. This would distribute street hawkers more evenly in new 'activity zones' (Ghana Institute of Planners, n.d.);¹⁹
- Greater car parking infrastructure in order to encourage people to walk instead of drive within the CBD;
- Public transport reform in order to increase public transport usage. A number of interviewees, including two from the government, identified improved public transport services as a way of reducing the number of cars on the road. Ghana's national public transport system in the 1970s (pre-SAPs) had less traffic congestion and also saw less street hawking, but later privatisation of the public transport system is thought to have contributed to more people opting to use cars. The World Bank and the Department for Urban Roads are reported to have data on how the creation of a bus rapid transit corridor could decrease transportation time for passengers and lead to less traffic on the roads;²⁰
- Reform of the public transport system to decrease the amount of taxis and vans on the road and provide for mass transit vehicles. This could also be used to support the relocation of hawkers, by providing subsidised transportation to new market areas.

Although the AMA has arguably not presented this 'defence', it should be noted that it has invested in a major re-haul of the public transport system, with a rapid transit service underway (GNA, 2011). For example, large-scale undertakings such as the World Bank-funded Urban Highways Transformation Project are being implemented with an aim of reducing travel times in the city. Interestingly, then, despite there being clear attempts by the AMA to both compensate hawkers and address wider transport and road problems, those who are against the eviction of street hawkers either deem these attempts insufficient or claim they do not demonstrate knowledge of the AMA and government of Ghana's work. There are questions to be asked, therefore, regarding the extent to which the AMA and the government of Ghana have *communicated* wider strategies to deal with congestion and the willingness of those who oppose the eviction of street hawkers to pay attention to the wider 'evidence' of the AMA and government of Ghana's actions.

¹⁹ Although it should be noted that the AMA is already supporting this kind of 'relocation' with limited success. The difference here may be that, rather than mandatory relocation, street hawkers are allowed to decide freely where to operate.

²⁰ However, the increase in congestion can also be attributed to 'pull' factors such as increased household income and greater car ownership, as well as other 'push' factors such as the large-scale loss of public sector jobs in the 1980s which have been seen as a key explanation for the proliferation in street hawkers since this period.

2.3 Implementing the policy

The implementation of the decongestion policy has drawn two major areas of critique, regarding 1) the conduct of the AMA Taskforce and 2) the AMA's capacity to undertake the required activities as intended.

The conduct of the Taskforce

It has been argued that the government of Ghana has, in general, taken an 'aggressive, combative and impulsive stance' against workers in the informal economy (Obeng-Odoom, 2011a) to the detriment of their wellbeing. This refers specifically to the Taskforce, which has been accused by street hawkers of carrying out its duties violently. The most recent incident, in October 2010, led to fighting between street hawkers and Taskforce members. The Taskforce was accused of approaching the hawkers with 'stones, clubs, and machetes', a claim vehemently denied by the AMA's Public Affairs Unit (Adepa Frempong, 2010).

Hawkers are not the only ones to have formed this negative conception of the Taskforce. One social commentator described the life of a street hawker as akin to 'nightfall in Soweto' owing to the threat of the 'Gestapo-trained taskforce'. Accra is, for the street hawker, an 'unsafe haven' full of 'marauding predators' capable of 'callous, beastly, and destructive acts' (Danquah Dampsey, 2009). While no doubt sensationalist, the evidence behind this piece was a well-known incident at Kaneshie (outside of the CBD), where street hawkers sleeping in their illegal structures were woken at 4 am by Taskforce members who had come to demolish their living and work space. The immediacy of these events can provoke deeply felt arguments which sometimes reflect events so immoral that to talk of research-based evidence, or evidence-based policy, may seem redundant.

Implementation capacity

The AMA has also been criticised for not having the capacity to implement the decongestion policy properly. This is not an argument against the eviction of street hawkers per se, but rather is directed towards the AMA's own failings to both plan and implement. One researcher believed that no capability or sustainability studies were in fact undertaken before embarking on the decongestion exercises in 2009.

This is evidenced, according to the informant, by the fact that, at one point during 2009, hawkers were removed from one area and policemen were placed along the roadside at 50-metre intervals. Such an approach is deemed unsustainable and unrealistic unless the decongestion goes 'deeper' and addresses the root causes of street hawking. Journalists also point to the AMA's failure to organise basic services such as waste management,²¹ and ask how the AMA can be expected to address the issue of street hawking at the same time. There are, it would seem, more urgent priorities for the AMA.

Market traders, market workers and researchers also highlighted the following capacity constraints to the decongestion policy's effective implementation:

- In contrast with allegations of armed violence, it is thought that, because the Taskforce does not use any weapons, their effectiveness is hindered.
- The Taskforce has no power to detain or arrest, and is therefore seen as 'soft'.
- The AMA often delays payments to low-level workers, leading to potential susceptibility to bribes.

²¹ For instance, in the Accra metropolis, only 25-30% of waste is collected (Quartey, 2007, in Aryeetey Bortei-Doku, et al., 2009).

- There is no clear mechanism to punish street hawkers: prisons lack space and the judicial system *'does not have time to deal with those people'*.

2.4 Monitoring, evaluating and learning

In keeping with other aspects of the policy debate, monitoring, evaluation and learning do not seem to have been applied systematically to decongestion activities. This has been reflected in the debate itself in two ways: in lesson learning from previous attempts at decongestion; and in monitoring and evaluating the impact of decongestion itself.

The first point to be made, on the government of Ghana's failure to learn from previous experiences in decongestion, is often articulated in the media. While the AMA is seen to be copying – or at least continuing – an old policy, it is argued that the failure of previous attempts to remove street hawkers should be heeded. The basic argument here concerns the apparent inevitability of the hawkers' return: the AMA is thought of as somewhat foolish to attempt yet another exercise.

Importantly, the thrust of much of this line of argument is not that the AMA is wrong to want to remove street hawkers from the CBD as much as that they are not doing enough. The lesson, so the argument runs, should have been learnt before. The Ghana Institute of Planners (n.d.), for instance, describes periodical decongestion activities as 'over 20 years of recycling of unsuccessful interventions'. The historical perspective is important: decongestion is seen to have been a political disaster for the previous (NPP) government, yet this lesson is thought to have gone unheeded. For example, Dadzie (2009a) argues that 'the pigheaded gentleman who started it all – Nii Adjiri Blankson [former AMA Chief Executive]– started without thinking about how it will affect the political fortunes of his party. They paid dearly for it [...] The NDC will not like to suffer the same fate.' These arguments are based in large part on experience and opinion. Even the Ghana Institute of Planners – in theory an authority in this debate – does not indicate whether research (its own or that of others) was used.

However, could successive governments have learned from previous ones? Although it is unclear whether any documented evaluations of the previous government's experience exists, no such evidence would appear to be in the public domain. Even if those involved in the reintroduced policy did have an appetite to learn from past experiences (including their own), this would likely be done on the basis of personal reflection and public opinion garnered through the media.

The suggestion that the AMA needs to learn from previous attempts to decongest the CBD is linked not only to the policy options and means of implementation available, but also to its perceived impact. This is different to the policy outcome (e.g. x number of hawkers evicted), as it refers to what happens as a result of evicting street hawkers. The AMA often expresses its satisfaction with decongestion in terms of process, that is, how the exercise is being implemented, but in terms of specific impacts it has said very little. One oft-cited impact refers to the AMA's use of large amounts of resources for the exercise, although exact figures are lacking and it is unknown whether it has recovered its full costs. However, in general, the urban middle-class Ghanaian public argue that, in their experience, in the periods when decongestion has been enforced adequately, the roads are clear, the pavements are more pleasant to walk on and shopping is less stressful.

This view – largely expressed privately in conversation and publicly in media reports – correlates with earlier research into public opinion. In 2007, the Centre for Cycling Expertise carried out a large-scale survey which sought to measure the impact of decongestion on pedestrians by measuring their attitudes following decongestion activities that year. The survey results indicated 86% responded that they felt 'good' (assumedly better than before) walking in the CBD after the decongestion exercise. Furthermore, 89% supported the decongestion exercise against 11% who did not. Moreover, the participants' responses

indicated that 92% felt the decongestion exercise had helped to improve the city outlook. The study also asked whether they supported the AMA in continuing the decongestion exercise: 89% were in favour (Quarshie and Siam, 2008).

Admittedly, evidence of public opinion is not the same as evidence of actual impact, which is, perhaps unsurprisingly, thin on the ground. The AMA itself does not appear to monitor the impact of decongestion. With prompting, however, the NRSC would be able to furnish its support for decongestion with evidence: according to Rudolph Buckley, Head of Monitoring and Evaluation, street hawking is associated more closely with slight injuries than with serious injuries or death. The NRSC asserts that there is a direct correlation between decongestion exercises and a reduction in slight road injuries. For example, the statistics for Greater Accra during the period April–June 2010 were of 542 reported injuries; in the period June–September 2010 (which apparently saw a period of heavy decongestion activity), this had reduced to 503.

The link between decongestion and road safety, as it appears here, is admittedly tenuous. Interestingly however, there would appear to be a genuine need to at least attempt to justify decongestion in terms of road safety impacts. According to the previous source, there is also evidence to suggest that, immediately after decongestion, travel times across the city decrease dramatically; drivers are ‘less stressed’ and therefore less likely to have an accident. These arguments are prompted, however. It is strange that this evidence – assuming it exists – does not appear more frequently in the media, nor is it publicised by the AMA.

As demonstrated, street hawkers have argued against decongestion both as a matter of principal and for fear of a loss of earnings. However, it is hard to know whether their arguments are based on experience or projection. Indeed, aside from the personal testimony of traders, there is little evidence on the impact of eviction on household income, although researchers have asserted that the evictions,

‘[...] exacerbate the poverty levels of vendors as the latter sometimes become redundant for certain time periods before finding new locations for their businesses. Relocating to the more spacious and less congested suburban areas has always been an unattractive option due to the perceived reduced volume of sales and hence profit margins’ (Asiedu and Agyei-Mensah, 2008).

Even if the government of Ghana were to monitor the impact of decongestion, it is likely that it would do so with reference to the problems the policy is intended to address rather than with a specific focus on poverty. The ‘poverty’ argument is propounded by the research community, which largely focuses on poverty as part of the international development discourse and does not therefore always address the AMA’s priorities. This focus may owe to both genuine research interest and the availability of donor funding for research organisations with an explicit concern for poverty reduction. However, the donor community has paid scant attention to the poverty-deepening aspect of the decongestion policy, leaving researchers with little opportunity to influence the agenda in this case.

How does the AMA monitor the impact of the decongestion policy? It was suggested by an AMA contractor that *‘they do not need to if they drive home from work’*, that is, the clear roads are testament to its impact. In general, it is not thought that the AMA has any monitoring systems in place, and these do not seem to have been invoked in any of its statements on decongestion. Evidence that could be used, such as that from the Centre for Cycling Expertise, is not.²²

It is therefore surmised that the AMA feels that the impacts are so obvious as not to need explicit reference. Two interviewees working for the government thought the AMA ‘monitors’ the impact of decongestion by listening to the radio or reading the paper. This is very

²² According to the author, the research was not even acknowledged by the AMA after a copy was sent.

significant, as it places an external source – the media – in the privileged position of being the major (and possibly only) mechanism aside from practical experience by which the effects of decongestion are reflected back to the AMA.

3 Factors affecting the role of research-based evidence

Having characterised both the debate and the role of research-based evidence in it, this section posits and explores three explanatory factors for the (limited) role of research-based evidence: 1) attitudes towards and understanding of what constitutes *knowledge* in the Ghanaian context; 2) the *relations* between the various actors with interests in the decongestion policy; and 3) the *capacity* of those engaging in the debate to supply, demand and use research-based evidence in the debate. These factors are not discrete: there is considerable overlap and interrelation.

3.1 The conception of knowledge and attitude to research

The relatively limited role of research-based evidence in this debate needs to be explained not just by well-worn arguments regarding capacity, although this is important (see Section 3.3) but also through a contextualised discussion about what is meant by knowledge in Ghana. This is a *tentative* explanation based on explorative research, and is therefore only the first step in explaining the relationship between a worldview (inevitably not shared by all) and the character of a policy debate.

In one sense, the seeming lack of importance given to gathering knowledge to be used in policymaking is lamented. The renowned journalist Albert Sam of The Graphic argued in an interview that the ‘great tragedy’ of countries such as Ghana is that they do not possess adequate statistical knowledge which is fit for purpose. This compares unfavourably with other countries: ‘*In Britain you print the information out on a bit of paper [...] it is all there inside the computer [...] but not here.*’

When it comes to the decongestion policy, the AMA has not been proactive in communicating whether any external or internal research has had an influence. This does not, of course, mean that decongestion is a ‘bad’ policy. Indeed, as explored, even among the AMA’s critics there is a general recognition that Accra’s congestion problems need to be addressed. In short, as Albert Sam noted, the research may not be there ‘*on paper [...] but the reality [reason for the policy] is there.*’

Practical evidence and knowledge

The juxtaposition of ‘paper’ with ‘reality’ is interesting, leading us back to a key characteristic of the debate: the use of practical evidence gained through experience to articulate an argument and – assumedly – form a position. The apparent lack of value placed on the need to investigate and verify the reasons for, alternatives to and impact of the decongestion policy does not therefore mean Ghanaians are not willing and able to construct arguments, evaluate information and make decisions based on this information (e.g. Lindberg and Morrison, 2008). The policy debate surrounding decongestion is *not* based on no evidence. It is, as argued, based on a different *kind* of evidence.

We have seen how the direct experience of seeing street hawkers interfere with the traffic has fed a negative image of street hawkers which corresponds to an existing perception of informal workers as a ‘nuisance’ polluting the city. Practical knowledge gained through direct experience

and sensation is another form of authoritative knowledge alongside, and often directly connected to and shaped by, collective 'knowledge' which has been transmitted through others and is subsequently reinforced by 'new' experiences of the same phenomena. What is also very clear is that, alongside 'inherited' knowledge, valued evidence is obtained through practical, direct experience. This experience is highly personalised and the validity of an argument based on such experience corresponds to the status of the person making the argument.

In other words, 'practical experience' is valued and/or seen to be valued over 'research-based' knowledge with regard to the decongestion policy. This is especially true of decision makers in the government, as well as those implementing the policy. In the words of one Taskforce member at Kinbu Gardens,

I do not see why they [the AMA] would need to have it on bits of paper when they can see it straight with our own eyes [...] for me myself I can see it every day and so can they. Do you think they are not intelligent?

The suggestions that 1) research ('paper') can add little to the knowledge already gained through both direct experience and 2) needing sources of information *outside* one's direct experience indicates one is not 'intelligent' are both extremely revealing. They intimate that to seek other sources of evidence is a sign of weakness. Indeed, attitudes within the government suggest that because '*[we] all read about it and see it*' there is little need to probe the evidence base on the decongestion policy further. The fear of not appearing knowledgeable is perhaps a strong disincentive for some policymakers to engage with research. Indeed, the practical 'worldliness' of Ghanaians can be explained with reference to both the way in which African religious belief is expressed in physical terms (Mbiti, 1969)²³ and the 'physicality' of the Akan, the *lingua franca* in Ghana (Gyekye, 1995 [1987]).

In Akan, there are two ways of referring to knowledge. The first is the noun *nyansa*, and the second is in terms of *nyimdee*, which can be translated more directly as 'sense'. Whereas the verb *nya* arguably refers to a process of arriving at 'wisdom', the verb *nim* better describes the immediate knowledge of 'knowing' or being familiar with something (e.g. a person, a place) based on the observation of external reality. In both cases, knowledge is associated with personally observed phenomena which agree with prior understandings of external reality based on 'received wisdom'.

The arguments surveyed in this paper are not irrational – they are based firmly on a degree of practical rationality. However, we find this rationality to be limited to the immediate 'facts on the ground'. The problem comes when personal experience is treated as an unquestionable truth. Indeed, the arguments presented on the various sides of the decongestion debate were described as being '*totally qualitative but given the status of 100% fact*', '*instinctive*' and '*created by anger and fear*'. While a qualitative argument is by no means an invalid argument, recognising the limitations of such an argument at the level of national policy is essential. It should be noted, however, that this paper is not suggesting that the AMA and the wider government of Ghana's evidence base for decongestion *is* purely qualitative (although this is cannot be counted out): what is being suggested is that it is *perceived* to be by researchers, hawkers and other interest groups.

Oral knowledge and past 'wisdom'

How do we explain the seeming lack of interest in research-based evidence among policymakers and civil society actors (aside from those of the research community)? A popular explanation seems to be that, in Ghana, people are used to gaining knowledge orally – through stories, rumour, mesmerised accounts of events and sometimes pure speculation. Sources of authoritative information are those close to you – family, friends, community members and

²³ In order to counter the tendency among some African scholars to speak of 'traditional African religion' as one unified religion, Mbiti was careful to emphasise that it was correct to speak of a number of religions under the same 'African' umbrella.

members of alternative networks. It could be argued that this is no different from anywhere in the world: newspaper stories based on speculation and unfounded 'gossip' are often infinitely more influential than stories based on rigorous evidence gathering, and even most decision makers are likely to be heavily influenced by the advice of people close to them.

The difference, and here we are talking of degree, is that in Ghana (and arguably other places in Africa) the spoken word – rather than the written word – is still revered, and the oral transfer of knowledge is a 'normal' and accepted part of the system. Knowledge is not valued because it is thought to be based on rigorous evidence, but because it derives from someone you respect. Knowledge – in the form of ideas, beliefs, practices, norms and principles – is often tied to the past and therefore enjoys special status as deriving from an older (wiser) generation. Religious ideas in Africa, for instance, are transferred and assimilated through the family and community. Crucially, their legitimacy is derived from them being 'traditions [that] have been handed down from their forefathers' (Mbiti, 1969). Although this description has been applied to the general public (e.g. Lindberg and Morrison, 2008 in their discussion of Ghanaian voters), it emerges that policymakers' attitudes are seen to be shaped by this understanding of knowledge.

What this means in practice is that knowledge coming from elder members of a family, network or community is respected and often above serious questioning. One focus group participant recounted how, for a child, it is normal to be told to '*shut up*' because '*you ask too many questions*'. By developing in a way that gives you limited freedom to question the world around you, or at least the received wisdom bestowed on you by people older than yourself, it is not hard to see how children grow into accepting, non-questioning adults. In Akan, this kind of seasoned knowledge is expressed as *nyansa*, as seen above, translated most accurately as 'wisdom'. *Nyansa* derives from the verb *nya* – to find, gain, obtain or experience. The subject of the verb is thought to be 'observing or experiencing something and then deriving something out of it' (Dzobo, 1992a).

What is derived is often wisdom, or common sense, associated with elder generations. A young person on the verge of adulthood may spend some time expressing a lack of *nyansa* by defying his/her parents, but on reaching adulthood (usually marked by marriage or the birth of a newborn) will be seen to have gained it. *Nyansa* therefore links lesson learning born out of experience with knowledge accumulated over a long period of time. This kind of maintenance (and perpetuation) of the 'received wisdom' or, expressed in Akan, *mpanyinfo wonyansa* ('wisdom of the elders') is clearly demonstrated in the case of the decongestion policy, where the received wisdom of the policy itself continues with little apparent recourse to critical appreciation of what the policy is based on or what it is contributing to.

In response to this issue, it has been suggested that the Ghanaian education system prevents a whole-scale change to this latent (and often manifest) attitude. While one informant asserted that the way in which children are taught in Ghana – whereby they 'learn facts by heart' rather than explore and question – does not allow for a 'spirit of enquiry' to develop, Dzodzo (1992a) argues that in both Akan and Ewe traditional thought knowledge is respected and its cultivation promoted. For instance, the Ewe proverb *Vi-bia-nya-ta-se medzoa – la o* ('The child who goes about inquiring to know what is happening is never an animal [fool]') indicates that, while knowledge that is passed down from elder generations is revered, this does not necessarily mean no new knowledge is assumed. In fact, to be human is to be able to enquire, ask questions and understand the world around you (ibid.).

What is being suggested is that it is common practice to accept 'wisdom' based on the (collective) experiences of the elder generation, whether this be in the familial or communal realm, or – as is the case here – in the world of politics. With regard to decongestion, we are also looking at a 'renewal' of an old policy (i.e. implemented by successive governments) which finds its footing in the previous policy formulations of previous political 'elders'. One justification for decongestion, therefore, is that the reasons behind needing to evict street hawkers have been 'handed down' from previous administrations. This is one way in which the

wisdom of the past is manifested in the policy debate. Received *criticisms* of decongestion may also be at play: such exercises are expected to fail, or are seen as immoral. When one can rely on an old argument, there is little incentive to re-examine and refurbish it for a new deployment. Further, as discussed, an argument which finds its reference in the authority accorded to it by tradition or precedent is also found in the attitude of (some) street hawkers who argue along the following logic: 'I do therefore I ought'. To not be allowed to sell their wares on the street would be to go against precedent and would be, to some extent, illogical.

There is a problem in reconciling this explanation with that of the importance of practical evidence in the debate. In the case of decongestion, there would seem to be a tension between the practical evidence that, according to many critics, current approaches to decongestion do not work, and the received 'wisdom' from past governments that such approaches should continue. How can this be explained? One explanation, given by the secretary of Odawna Market, is that the decision makers in the AMA view success in this endeavour to be particularly satisfying:

Sometimes these men [...] they think that because the man before did not succeed then he should be the one to try and succeed. The one who tries the impossible and wins will have a great reputation.

However, in order to reconcile the importance of received wisdom and that of practical evidence, it is also likely that there is a fear of going against the received wisdom of the past: this is now the 'accepted' approach to the problem of street hawkers. In the absence of a national urban policy which addresses the city's structural problems, there is little incentive, will or resources to address anything but its manifest symptoms.

What role for research?

Taken together, what does this mean for research-based evidence in policymaking and wider policy debates? It is reasonably clear that research is not valued the same way in Ghana as in many Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. According to one informant, *'we do not value research in this country'*. This has been seen to lead to a situation in which a frustrated research community feels pressured to have 'international' concerns and leanings in order to raise funds. Another researcher, not named here as an interviewee, lamented the 'state of affairs' in Ghana:

All research has to be fit into a framework given to us by others [...] everything is about 'international development' and development policy when [...] if we were to look at ourselves in the mirror [...] all we are talking about is national policy.

The implication here is that, although the research community in Ghana may have a relatively significant influence over the government of Ghana, it is still not 'valued' in the way it (arguably) should be.²⁴

A number of interviewees expressed doubt with regard to whether the majority of policymakers, particularly those in the AMA, would understand the concepts of 'evidence-based policy' and 'research-based evidence'. The issue immediately related to this is that evidence-based policy and research were described as things that Ghanaian policymakers (as well as wider civil society) saw as for 'other people' (i.e. the various representatives, researchers and consultants who make up the 'international community'). This was particularly the case with regard to monitoring and evaluating projects, programmes and overall policies: one informant remarked that,

This is not something that we feel is ours to do [...] someone else does it for us. We think we are not even supposed to, although I know this is foolishness.

24 In comparison with in other countries.

The perceived 'otherness' and externality of policy informed by research-based evidence is significant, suggesting not only that it lacks centrality as a concern among national policymakers but also that the influence of international actors has meant Ghanaian policymakers lack incentives to engage with research-based evidence, creating a dependency or lack of compulsion to use research (see Ayuk and Marouani, 2007).

3.2 Relationships between principal actors

Policy influence and discussion are relational, and therefore the way in which research-based evidence is used in any context will to some extent be framed by the types of relationships that exist across government, in and between state and non-state actors. In the case of the decongestion policy, the AMA assumes the centre stage of the analysis as the 'producer' of the dominant policy argument,²⁵ as well as the 'target' of other arguments from non-state actors. The situation is complicated by various ministries and their interest in the policy, who *may* act as an indirect mediator in getting research-based evidence into AMA policy.

The data gathered on relations between the various actors were both inconclusive and not comprehensive enough to make firm statements on how the relational aspect of policy discourse – and influence – accounts for the relatively weak direct influence of research-based policy in the decongestion policy. However, key findings emerged to the effect that relations between the AMA and both other government ministries and non-governmental actors are negatively affected by 1) the nature of the AMA itself, which is perceived to act relatively independently from (or at least unaffected by), meaning that influencing the AMA and communicating research-based evidence is difficult; and 2) the absence of a national urban policy which would serve to coordinate and regulate these roles, remits and communications.

National-level relations with the AMA

On the issue of decongestion, national-level actors in the government of Ghana would appear reluctant to involve themselves in the debate and have limited opportunity to consult with the AMA. Potentially, this means it is difficult for research-based evidence possessed by ministries to be read at local government level. Indeed, the policy is quite explicitly 'AMA owned', with national government figures keen to emphasise that their respective ministries have little to do with it. A survey of relevant government ministries confirmed this: '*We have no one here who knows about this*' was the standard response from government functionaries (excluding key informants) when enquiries were made at various ministries.²⁶ While this could be the result of an unlucky ministry visit yielding inaccurate data, the level of disjuncture between the AMA and national ministries with regard to decongestion was highlighted further by one of the named key informants, who said,

Decongestion was set up [...] in a way [...] that reduced anyone else's [other than the AMA's] voice. I do not really know how decisions were made, or whether the information that we have provided [to the AMA] has been taken on board. As far as I am aware, no formal reporting system exists between the AMA and the ministry with regard to decongestion.

Routine meetings do occur between the AMA and respective ministries (e.g. the Ministry of Health), and formal links exist between the Department for Urban Roads and the AMA, with the former having an advisor placed in the latter. Whether the nature of their engagement extends to the decongestion policy, and what level of influence the Department for Urban Roads is able to wield, is debatable. However, as far as the interviewees knew, neither the

25 That is, that which is in force, rather than being either more persuasive or more popular.

26 For example, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, which has provided a significant proportion of the funds to the AMA for the decongestion exercise, said it was unable (rather than unwilling) to comment on how the policy was being monitored within government given its lack of involvement.

Ministry of Health nor the Ministry of Roads and Highways has had, or is likely to have, any formal input into the decongestion policy.

This cannot be attributed only to reluctance from national ministries; it owes also to the AMA's (un)willingness to engage with others on the decongestion issue. While there is a clear incentive to do so (the government of Ghana supports the AMA's decongestion activities), the opportunity to furnish its activities with input from other government sources has not been taken. The situation is not helped by the absence of an urban policy which would serve as a point of organisation for communications and input.

This is not to say, however, that relevant and robust research-based evidence is not reaching and not being communicated by the AMA purely for these reasons: the existence of such research-based evidence is itself questionable.

The influence of non-governmental actors on the AMA

To what extent can and do civil society actors influence the AMA with regard to decongestion? The answer is that formal consultation with civil society is limited: one of the persuasive arguments against the AMA's actions is that affected parties were not consulted before the evictions (e.g. COHRE, 2002). Further, the direct influence of NGOs over the AMA is constrained, according to Amnesty International's Country Director, because the AMA is 'very difficult to penetrate'.

This is a sentiment shared by members of the research community, who in other areas find themselves wielding great influence over policy decisions.²⁷ With reference to decongestion, one interviewee described the relationship governing the research community's inputs into the national government's thinking as '*poorly developed, chaotic and unplanned*'. This can be attributed to both a lack of relevant research to offer the AMA and the AMA's lack of engagement with the research community. The lack of relevant research can be attributed in part to a lack of funding and of interest from both the central government and donors in terms of providing tailored research outputs for the AMA, which again suggests that a national policy which encompasses decongestion may provide the incentive and channels through which relevant research could be supported. The research community's relationship with the AMA is described as constrained, with one researcher, Franklin Obeng-Odoom, positing that they were tempted to say that,

[...] the relationship between the AMA and Ghana's research community is limited. This is a curious situation [...] because [...] urban land management and the management of people's movement is a serious matter in the management of cities, which is what the AMA is tasked with doing.

However, while the AMA may not be overly keen to cultivate relations with the research community, this should not render the latter a passive set of actors. Relevant research outputs do exist, but have not, it would seem, found their way to – or at least had any influence over – the AMA. It is therefore important to ask what the research community itself is doing to cultivate relations with the AMA. In general, efforts seem to be limited because it is assumed that the AMA is uninterested, but because of time and know-how constraints. It was suggested that, while influencing and communication strategies on particular issues are coordinated at institutional level, individual researchers – working on issues seen to be more marginal – are

27 On a number of policy issues, such as the economy, the government of Ghana is thought to engage with think-tanks such as the Institute for Economic Affairs and the Centre for Democratic Development particularly well, in addition to having well-established relations with universities which host research institutes such as ISSER and the Centre for Social Policy Studies, based at the University of Legon. Researchers at ISSER have in fact had substantial input into the drafting of Ghana's first Urban Policy, which is yet to be adopted. Some of these organisations are partly funded by the government of Ghana, as well as receiving significant support from international actors such as the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). These organisations are in general not perceived to have been co-opted by government, although there is concern that the research interests of donors hold more sway over research agendas than those of the government.

left to their own devices, according to George Owosu at ISSER. Equipping individual researchers working on issues that do not fit into a neat policy area with the skills to influence actors other than national ministries appears to constitute a gap.

Other civil society actors, who are similarly critical of the AMA's willingness to engage with them, tend to favour the media as a way of putting their agenda into the public domain (e.g. COHRE), which could constrain their ability to present research-based evidence, should they possess it. Unsurprisingly, those who are critical of the AMA's approach to decongestion seem to enjoy less engagement, whereas the media, which (with exceptions) is largely supportive of (or at least neutral commentators on) the AMA's actions, has enjoyed a significant amount of engagement with key AMA figures, including the mayor.²⁸ Overall, this is indicative of the importance accorded to media houses in communicating political information, as well as being a reflection of policymakers' own preferences regarding sources of knowledge.

However, as the experience of the Centre for Cycling Expertise shows, even when civil society groups are both *in favour* of the policy and can *provide evidence* to support their view, engagement with the AMA has proved elusive. The position of those in the private sector is even more difficult to pin down: why have large companies which distribute their goods through street hawkers failed to put substantial pressure on the government to halt their eviction? According to George Owosu at ISSER, this is because private companies '*know what they are doing is wrong [in the eyes of the AMA]*' and would not feel comfortable explicitly defending the presence of street hawkers in central Accra.

The AMA does, however, engage with civil society in a marketplace context every day through the management of markets and the enforcement of decongestion. At Odawna Market, for instance, the market's management works side-by-side with both street hawkers (who occupy the space outside the market and occasionally within) and market traders who possess officially sanctioned stalls. Taskforce members assigned to the market are allegedly on first-name terms with many of the street hawkers, as are the market traders themselves. In the case of the Taskforce, the market's secretary says the AMA must occasionally rotate Taskforce teams in order to prevent and disrupt friendly relations developing between the evictors and evictees. This suggests the AMA is acting in response to instances when this has occurred, with negative consequences.²⁹ Casual and repeated observation of the Taskforce team at Odawna suggested that the AMA's concerns may be well founded.

As far as the AMA is concerned, there seems to be little in the way of linkages with donors, despite their relatively strong influence and presence in the country. For instance, the governance advisor in the DFID country office has not engaged with the AMA during his tenure of three years, and DFID itself has no experience in dealing with the decongestion issue. Much of this could be explained by the absence of an urban policy, as well as by donor targets being national rather than local in character. International donors, as providers and proponents of research-based evidence, are both a key link in the uptake chain as well as a crucial driver: without engagement with donors, the AMA is missing out on a way of strengthening its policy argument through research-based evidence.

3.3 Capacity to supply, demand and use research-based evidence in debate

'Capacity' here refers to the ability the various actors in the decongestion debate possess in *supplying* research-based evidence, *demanding* research-based evidence from the required sources and *using* research-based evidence to influence the policy debate. These issues cut across the principal actors in the debate (the research community and advocacy organisations, the national government, the AMA, the media, street traders and other interest groups) that

28 The journalists who had input into this research, for instance, said they frequently communicated with the mayor himself and were often called to publish statements to the public regarding decongestion.

29 That is, Taskforce members have been persuaded not to remove particular street hawkers.

are likely to have a fluid relationship with the supply, demand and use of research-based evidence.³⁰ The capacity of these various actors is seemingly affected by a number of factors, including understandings of knowledge and relations, as well as financing and a lack of know-how.

Supply of research-based evidence

As suggested, the seeming lack of research-based evidence informing the debate cannot be attributed only to a wilful preference for not using or referring to it: it needs to be read also in terms of a lack of supply of relevant research-based evidence. This issue has already been touched on with regard to the constrained relations between the AMA and national ministries and civil society actors – the research community in particular.

Policy research in Ghana is relatively strong and well funded, with a number of high-profile research centres such as ISSER and the Centre for Democratic Development producing internationally respected work. In general, the capacity to provide relevant research is there if the external interest (and funding) is. In the case of decongestion, research has been undertaken and published, but its influence on the AMA is relatively unknown. In relation to the debate, these research outputs do not seem to figure strongly, and researchers themselves do not seem to have much interest in participating aside from in their existing publications.

Two capacity challenges exist here. The first concerns the capacity of researchers to involve themselves in the debate and to shape the public discourse, The second is that those who oppose decongestion have not engaged with the AMA using 'like-for-like' arguments, compounded by what we assume is a dismissive attitude towards researchers and NGOs such as COHRE and Amnesty International which employ the language of poverty reduction and human rights rather than that used to describe the AMA's own priorities. Thus, the AMA is likely to find research outputs – which criticise an approach the AMA has already implemented – irrelevant and not in keeping with its current concerns.

This is not to say that the research *is* lacking relevance; just that it is likely to be perceived as such, particularly if it does not employ the AMA's language. What it needed, therefore, is a concerted attempt on the part of the research community to work together to produce research that is clearly of relevance to the AMA's immediate concerns and fits 'neatly' into existing strategic provisions. While producing relevant research does not constitute a capacity gap per se, communicating relevant research and using it to influence in a strategic way does. Franklin Obeng-Odoom admitted that,

I think we (I am included) need some training to know how to disseminate research work and communicate it to policymakers.³¹

This issue aside, the supply of relevant research on the issue of decongestion is also thought to be constrained by the research agenda being shaped by both the government and the donor community, which both tend to concentrate on national-level issues. Without buy-in from these actors which can be translated into research funding, researchers are limited in their ability to work on areas they deem important. As a local level issue, decongestion may suffer from this lack of interest, leading to a weakening of capacity on the supply side. Indeed, according to the transport advisor at the Ministry of Health, '*little in the way of research*' exists to inform the decongestion debate.

30 It was not possible to carry out a full assessment of the capacity of each actor, and therefore this section presents initial impressions from within the scope of this case study.

31 An example of existing research failing to influence policy related to the sale of land to 'cronies' was as follows: 'A detailed analysis of land acquisition was done by Dr. Odami Larbi, Project Director of the Land Administration Project. The work was published in a journal called Land Use Policy in 2004. Most of the issues raised in the recent controversy were discussed extensively. My question is, where was Dr. Odami Larbi in all the recent discussion?'

National government

At the national level, the government of Ghana's ability to supply, demand and use research-based evidence is thought to be improving. Most ministries have staff responsible for both research and monitoring, as well as an increasing interest in commissioning research from think-tanks, research institutes and NGOs. This development is, however, seen to be heavily influenced by donor preferences and donor financing. According to one unnamed informant,

They [donors] want that we [ministries] keep asking for research [...] it is good to have this research because it is useful to attract funding and helps us engage with stakeholders.

However, lack of funding for research activities and limited staffing to manage the undertaking or the commissioning of high-quality research are constraints to the national government's ability to ground its policies thoroughly in research-based evidence. Combined with this, there is thought to be little information sharing between ministries:

Even if one ministry, Ministry A, had the right research to help Ministry B, there are no clear mechanisms in place to ensure this information is shared. It relies on a bright person to make the connection themselves, if they have time and if they want to. But there are no points for helping other ministries; you know, it is about helping your ministry.

While there are pockets of government that do have the capacity to engage with research-based evidence, such as the NRSC and the Ministry of Women and Children, and there are a number of other agencies (such as the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and the Office of National Statistics) which necessarily undertake and use research-based evidence, national-level capacity to generate, use and share research-based evidence across ministries is not high.

The AMA

The capacity weaknesses at national level are – perhaps unsurprisingly – magnified within the AMA. As we have seen, at policy level, the AMA enters into limited relationships with citizens given a lack of time and resourcing, among other factors. That the AMA has very little capacity to undertake, demand or use research-based evidence is in keeping with much of the information already presented, summed up by one ministry advisor thus: *'I doubt the AMA would even know what evidence-based policy is'*. When asked why relevant ministries did not try to put pressure on or offer support to the AMA to offer a better understanding of the research-based evidence underlying the decongestion policy, one informant explained that *'they know it would be a waste of time'*.

A key constraint to the AMA's scope for supplying, demanding and using policy-relevant research is the absence of an overarching urban policy framework. This has meant there is little incentive or pressure to work with other ministries that may be able to supply the AMA with research. This is compounded by already-weak information sharing between the national and local levels of government. In general, the perceived lack of research-based evidence being used by the AMA owes in part to the AMA's confused problem identification, as discussed in Section 3.2. Indeed, according to one academic, *'decongestion has no endgame'* – it possesses no policy objective and is undertaken in itself (i.e. with a view only to removing street hawkers). This means those trying to present contrary arguments must focus, seemingly like the AMA, on the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of the very existence of street hawkers (and their settlements) by using moral arguments rather than engaging with research-based evidence.

The difficulties facing civil society actors when attempting to engage with the AMA have been touched on. However, there is a general perception that, even if the AMA were more engaged

with civil society, they would be unable to provide the required information. According to one street hawker,

Go and ask them about it [the rationale behind the decongestion policy [...]] if they see you, it will bring you nothing [i.e. the visit will not be fruitful] [...] and if they tell you something his neighbour will tell you something different.

The implication here is that, although individuals in the AMA may have their own opinions or justifications to explain the decision to evict street hawkers, the institution lacks the capacity to communicate its strategic position in a way that suggests rigorous evidence is at the heart of the policy. Rather, the policy – and the AMA itself – would appear to suffer from the historical trajectory on which the policy is based: the reasons for the policy have been assumed into Ghanaian political folklore and there is very little incentive for anyone within the government to challenge the received wisdom of previous decision makers. In this way, existing practices surrounding how knowledge is transferred can act as a hindrance to research-based evidence uptake, in terms of formulating the right research questions to commission, searching for alternative policy approaches and being willing to justify policy using recent research and monitoring data.

The media

There is little doubt that the media's influence on the debate is significant, often reflecting the urban middle class's frustration with street hawkers and providing a channel for social and political commentators to articulate well-voiced opinions on the matter. As the primary source and collector of real-time information on decongestion activities, the media provides a large proportion of the practical evidence used to frame the policy debate, including statements made by the AMA, reporting on particular events or occurrences and providing a window for writers to present their largely negative views of street hawkers.

While much of the reporting is relatively neutral in terms of ensuring both sides of the argument are covered, the media lacks the capacity to undertake longer-term investigative reports which provide a more critical analysis of the dynamics underlying the AMA's decisions and activities. This is in part because of the nature of the media in Ghana, which is predicated on short, timely reports with little analysis. This approach, which relies on the description of events as they unfold, means there is little scope for the media to demand more from the AMA in terms of research-based evidence. Existing criticism of the AMA tends to question the morality and efficacy of its actions but not the theoretical basis. There is a large gap in the debate, therefore: the media could be acting as the channel and facilitator of demands for the AMA's rationale behind decongestion, including its evidence base.

This lack of serious questioning regarding the evidence base for decongestion, which constitutes a missed opportunity, not only is about the media's capacity to think in terms of research-based evidence, but relates more generally to the received wisdom of previous attempts to decongest the CBD in which the original justification is, in practice, largely beyond examination.

Street hawkers and market traders

The capacity of street hawkers to engage with research-based evidence is limited by both their ability to understand research and how it can be used, and the extent to which they could organise themselves to commission it to be used to influence the AMA. That they lack the capacity to undertake research themselves seems to be an assumed 'fact': indeed, the discourse surrounding street hawkers feeds an image of them as illiterate and, according to one hawker at Tema Station, they are treated like they are *'without sense'*. Although such attitudes reiterate the prominence of cultural stereotypes in this policy debate, it is fair to say that, in general, street hawkers lack the educational level required to even start thinking about using research-based evidence to bolster their arguments.

Further, street hawkers do not organise themselves well. Existing research by Kwankye et al. (2008) suggests that not only are the majority of street hawkers not member of any associations, but also they are not aware of the existence of any such associations open for them to join. Without a central point of contact, conducting research (including the collection of monitoring data) on street traders is difficult. This has perhaps contributed to the relative dearth of information on them.

When street hawkers' associations do exist, they are 'too weak to engage in any meaningful dialogue with city authorities on behalf of the vendors' (Kwankye et al., 2008). 'Associations' are also understood loosely by the street traders themselves, often referring more to informal groups than formal affiliations. One respondent based around Tema Station explained that the association she belonged to '*does not have a name*', meets every day '*because we are selling*' and is '*just ourselves*' (i.e. she associates with people in the area in which she sells rather than a formal entity).³² Another described how a number of hawkers in the Makola area had '*agreed*' that the Taskforce were '*evil*' and '*should be kicked in the back*'.

When associations do decide to influence the policy agenda, it is hard to see how research-based evidence would be a preferred strategy: indeed, recent events suggest that, when street hawkers organise, they do so in order to create threats to the AMA. According to one market stall owner, even the Traders Association for formal market traders at Odawna,³³ which has a number of complaints about the effects of the decongestion policy and the manner in which it was carried out, is '*very inactive and not strong*' given the weak ties between stall owners and the relative newness of the market itself.

While street hawkers may be unlikely to use research-based evidence proactively, it has been suggested that the AMA could have used (and still could use) more rigorous arguments in order to 1) educate street hawkers on what they and the city as a whole stand to gain from the decongestion policy and 2) demonstrate the dangers of street hawking for both the hawkers themselves and the wider population. According to an interviewee at the NRSC, the educational campaign undertaken by the AMA was not sufficient in providing street hawkers with incentives to move to designated market areas, or in providing disincentives for hawking, aside from the threat of eviction. Therefore, '*a marketing person is needed to package the AMA's ideas about decongestion*' because it is important to communicate with the public and ensure they '*understand the reasons why you [government] are doing things*'.

However, as already articulated, there is doubt as to whether the communication of a rigorous argument with a strong evidence base would have much effect on street hawkers. In the words of one informant from the Ministry of Health, '*things like statistics [...] they will not take notice, they will not understand them*'. This is linked to our previous findings, which suggest that the best way to convince street hawkers of the desirability of the decongestion policy is by providing incentives that act as pull factors towards alternative livelihoods.

The AMA's perceived failure to communicate adequately with the citizens of Accra raises a number of governance questions, ranging from the overall issue of local government capacity to that of transparency, mechanisms for citizens to question and criticise the metropolitan government and the extent to which it is the AMA's responsibility to 'package' its policies.

32 Author's translation from Twi.

33 Some of whom, it is assumed, were formerly street hawkers.

4 Conclusion

On the basis of the preceding discussion, this concluding section offers an answer to this paper's two fundamental questions: what is role of research-based evidence in the decongestion debate; and how can its role be accounted for?

First, however, the debate as it appears in this paper needs to be contextualised. A key methodological point to make about the nature of the debate itself and implications for attempting to 'do' research in policy debates more generally is that this research attempts to *order* what is a very complex, non-linear, indirect 'conversation'. The decongestion debate (with a focus on the eviction of street hawkers) does not constitute a single event: like many other debates, it is an evolving discourse which involves privately and publicly articulated arguments made known to different actors. To an extent, this paper is an attempt to reconstruct the debate in a unified, linear way, by comparing and contrasting arguments which have appeared in a variety of situations, over different times and for different reasons. In short, therefore, this not a 'like-for-like' debate: we are not considering an adversarial-style exchange of arguments in which competing actors are forced to argue against each other.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the debate is not characterised by a high level of research-based evidence in either the formation or the articulation of a position or argument. The most 'research-heavy' aspect of the debate has been in relation to alternative policy options, although the level of the AMA's engagement with this is unclear.

In this paper, three factors have been used to explain the limited role of research-based evidence in the debate. The first relates to attitudes and understandings of what knowledge constitutes in Ghana, which to a large extent explains the predominance of practical evidence over research-based evidence in the debate. Experience or everyday common knowledge (which can also be gained orally or transmitted from one's predecessors), that is, evidence which is taken to be obvious and – to an extent – beyond question, is privileged, which renders the need for research-based evidence unnecessary. As a result, there is little willingness among either street hawkers or government actors to seek research-based evidence. Thus, the debate is at somewhat of a standstill, as a result of the steadfast positions held by these actors which – through experience – gather more and more 'evidence' as the issues the debate concerns are lived. The scope for influencing the principal actors in this debate using research-based evidence is therefore extremely limited. The key point to be drawn from this is that this does not mean the debate – or the actors within it – lack logic or fail to deal with evidence. The issue is whether 'practical evidence' is also bound up with unexamined assumptions, stereotypes, values and beliefs which condition the way everyday experience is perceived.

Second, the debate – which is relational by its very nature – suffers from unproductive relations between key actors, to the detriment of the use of research-based evidence. Crucially, national-level government actors in the ministries and researchers seem to be reluctant to involve themselves in the debate, seeing it as something of a foregone conclusion. This lessens the likelihood of research-based evidence (should it exist) being communicated to the AMA. Further, given the absence of a national urban policy, there is limited buy-in or scope for national-level government actors to formally align themselves with the AMA's decongestion policy. In general, urban issues are not at a premium, with donors in Ghana having little interest in what are local-level problems. In turn, this has affected the relationship between researchers and donors, who would normally be in a good position to try to broker relations between the research community and the AMA. To an extent, much of the blame can be placed on the AMA for being – or at least being seen to be – unwilling to engage with others. However, the extent to which researchers have been proactive in communicating with the AMA also needs to be questioned.

Third, and directly linked to relational issues, is the problem of capacity to supply, demand, understand and use research-based evidence across the board. On the part of those who oppose decongestion, the supply of *relevant* research is constrained by a number of factors, including funding issues, a lack of experience and know-how to engage with the AMA, limited opportunities to communicate because of poor relationships with the AMA and the language of the research itself which does not fit into the AMA's development priorities or seem to be grounded in the challenges of everyday reality the AMA is proceeding from. These arguments not only lack influence but also are, it would seem, largely dismissed.

However, should relevant research-based evidence exist, the biggest hindrance to its use in the debate is arguably the weaknesses of the AMA itself. First, in spite of Ghana being relatively strong in linking research and policy, this has – unsurprisingly – not filtered down to the lower levels of government. In turn, this means the AMA does not seem to place value on research-based evidence and therefore does not seek it or commission it. In addition, beyond a number of short statements in the media, the AMA's communication of the rationale behind the eviction of street hawkers is limited. This means the AMA's actions are viewed as a discriminatory attack – not without grounds – which lacks an evidence base. The tone of the debate is therefore set: a lack of research-based evidence begets a lack of research-based evidence from other actors in the debate. Moreover, relationships between the AMA and other relevant actors – both government and non-government – do not appear to be characterised by a willingness to engage on the issue of decongestion.

A related consideration which has implications for how to support the increased role of research-based evidence in the debate concerns the limited way the media is used to propagate arguments and its failure to report critically on the issue. This is something of a missed opportunity for both encouraging a 'like-for-like' debate and feeding research-based evidence into the debate. However, the media, which could potentially act as an arbiter in the debate by adopting a more demand-led approach for evidence from the AMA, does not possess the resources to address this.

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Annexe: list of interviewees

Name	Affiliation
Franklin Obeng-Odoom	Department of Political Economy, University of Sydney
George Owusu	ISSER, University of Legon
Beatrice Claire Adu	Joy FM
Albert Sam	The Graphic
Mensah Quarshie	Centre for Cycling Expertise
Elizabeth Akanbombire	Child Labour Unit, Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs
Chris Appiah	Transport Planner, Ministry of Roads and Highways
Ebo Hammond	Ghana Health Services, Ministry of Health
Josephine Nkorofu	Assessor, Internal Revenue Service, Makola Market
Anthony Mompoti	Town Planner, Greater Accra Regional Planning Office
Lawrence K. Amesu	Country Director, Amnesty International
Rudolph P.K. Buckley	Head of Monitoring and Evaluation, NRSC
David Pedley	Governance Advisor, DFID
Audrey Gadzepko	Governance expert, PDA
Emelyne Eggle	PDA
Glowen Kyei Mensah	PDA
Celia Marshall	Co-director, PDA
Tony Dogbe	Co-director, PDA
George Adhiale	PDA
Betty	Street hawker, Makola Market
Ama	Street hawker, Tema station
Ekua	Street hawker, Nkrumah Circle
Victoria Mensah	Market seller, Nkrumah Circle
Gracie Nyamekye	Market seller, Makola Market
'Ebow'	Secretary, Odawna Market Secretariat
'Efu'	Member, Odawna Market Secretariat
Ato Amisah	Taxi driver
Anonymous	Shop owner, Makola Market
Anonymous	AMA contractor
Anonymous	Taskforce member
Anonymous	Taskforce member

This research also benefited from the input of the following people:

Gary Forster, Transaid
Guido Kooijman, University of Delft
Numerous hawkers at Nkrumah Circle, Tema Station, Tudu Station, Barnes Road, Agbobloshie Market, Makola Market and High Street