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# The agency of national government in negotiating resilient urban infrastructure development: the case of GARID, Accra

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## ABSTRACT

Resilient infrastructure is one of the most critical needs of cities, particularly African cities, where rapid urbanization and climate change present daunting challenges to governments and city authorities facing significant resource and capacity constraints. In the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) perennial flooding has drawn a wide range of international donors, agencies, and institutions to finance major urban infrastructure investments, requiring close interaction with political decision-makers. Here we focus on the transcalar politics of such urban developments, through the case of the World Bank-funded Greater Accra Climate Resilient and Integrated Development Project (GARID). We question assumptions that these investments are reformatting city governments for globally oriented, financialized development. Instead, the process has fostered centralization of decision-making in central government entities while city governments have had little agency. A range of different actors, notably central government ministries, World Bank project officials, consultants and communities, shaped the “landing” and “fixing” of this international investment in Accra, giving rise to emergent transcalar institutional and territorial formations. Rather than a scalar analysis of urban development politics, we argue that the power relations amongst these different actors, drawn together in transcalar territorial networks, should be the focus of analytical attention and policy concern.

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Accra; GARID; resilience; transcalar territorial networks; urban infrastructure development; national agency

## Introduction

Resilient infrastructure is heralded globally as one of the most critical needs of cities, particularly African cities where rapid urbanization and the potential impacts of climate change remain daunting challenges to many governments and city authorities who are also experiencing significant resource and capacity constraints (World Bank, 2017a). In the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA), Ghana’s most urbanized region, perennial flooding has become a “monster” of the city because of a complex mix of factors,

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including poor planning, inadequate infrastructure to channel rainwater, and limited capacity to predict rainfall volumes or to control solid waste pollution in city drainage systems (Amoako, 2017; Owusu & Obour, 2020). As rightly observed by Pieterse et al. (2018), the realities of limited infrastructure combined with acute financing challenges often create a situation where there is tremendous pressure on the existing infrastructure investment budgets in terms of who and what it will prioritize and service. In Ghana, this assessment is supported by the Ghana Infrastructure Plan (GIP), 2018-2047, which estimates the country's infrastructure financing gap to be US\$37.2 billion a year (see NDPC, 2019). Consequently, in Accra and other African cities, private-sector players, international donors, development agencies, national and supranational institutions (such as the World Bank, China Development Bank and United Nations) have responded to this situation by connecting with political decision-makers to implement numerous large-scale resilient urban infrastructure development (UID) projects across the continent (Hönke et al., 2024).

This article focuses on the case of the World Bank-funded Greater Accra Climate Resilient and Integrated Development (GARID) project, initiated in 2019 to address the city's perennial flooding through substantial improvements in drainage, waste management and infrastructure systems. The formation of such large-scale projects, some have argued, opens scope for new investment vehicles and spatial fixes for speculative development and "green structural adjustments" characterized by the mobilization of private finance, alongside efforts to build local government capacity and bankability (Bigger & Webber, 2021; Mawdsley, 2016). However, much investment in infrastructure, and notably in the collective infrastructure required to mitigate floods, sea level rise, and public goods like sanitation, solid waste and sewerage, comes rather through national governments' resources, multi-lateral or individual donor contributions, and concessional or "soft" loans (Owusu, 2004, 2015; Soule, 2019). Moreover, far from successfully rolling out an agenda for local government capacity and bankability, we have identified that large-scale investments from developmental, sovereign and private sector sources significantly consolidate the power of central government agencies and actors (Robinson et al., 2024). This is partly driven by protocols governing country-to-country engagements, and those which have emerged over time to protect country sovereignty in negotiating development agreements. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) commit donor agencies to respect national policies and plans, and to align their processes to national processes.

This paper therefore considers how national government actors, represented by state institutions, departments, and ministries, make and influence decisions regarding the specific outcomes of UID (Robinson et al., 2024; Shatkin, 2022), raising questions about the World Bank's ability to solely "reformat local governments across the Global South" in pursuit of urban resilience (Bigger & Webber, 2021, p. 37). In addition, initiatives toward achieving urban resilience involve a wide range of actors in the process of governing and in shaping how projects are governed (Hönke et al., 2024). We highlight the importance of state and non-state actors and their networks alongside international investors or donors in pulling a myriad of technical and managerial resources from across different contexts and horizons to ensure the "landing" of finance and "fixing" of development projects (Halbert & Rouanet, 2014). The multiple interests implicated in UID processes lead to a close entanglement of "global", "national" and "local" scales

in decision-making. With this in mind, we turn to the concept of transcalarity as a useful theoretical lens for comprehending the (re)production of urban resilience projects as the outcome of transcalar territorial networks (TTNs) (Goulding et al., 2023; Halbert & Rouanet, 2014; Robinson et al., 2024). In the GARID case, we note that central government actors have been actively involved across the transnational, national and local arenas of infrastructure production. We therefore probe a particular sub-set of elements of the “transcalar territorial networks” which emerge around the large-scale urban development project, namely those which pivot around the agency of central government actors. Rather than theorizing from dominant conceptualizations in international urban studies (such as neoliberalization or financialization), we seek to rebuild analyses of urban development politics starting in African contexts, and responding to the challenges of urbanization there (Myers, 2018; Pieterse et al., 2018; Robinson, 2022).

We first recount how the decision to embark on such a large-scale resilience project was taken across a range of events, actors and institutions. The devastating experiences of persistent flooding and the history of attempts to address this problem played an important role in initiating the project we focus on here. This undermines a narrative which centers on circuits of international development policy (Bigger & Webber, 2021). Secondly, the paper considers how the early organizational and financing decisions for the project were assembled across different actors operating with different spatial reach and interests but finding a shared commitment to mitigating flood risks in Accra. Already at this stage, the agency of central government in shaping the project is impressive. On this basis, we then discuss how the interests of different central government actors and agencies, in negotiation with transnational actors and in relation to distinctive pathways of political and community agency, informed the specific configuration of institutional roles and power relationships associated with the project implementation and sustainability, determining its extent, timing and likely impacts.

We therefore argue that wider analyses of urban development politics could benefit from a more sustained engagement with the powerful role of national state actors and agencies alongside transnational development actors, both of which have been neglected in urban studies which has focussed instead on the municipal scale (Brenner, 2019; Robinson et al., 2024; Shatkin, 2022). However, we also suggest that to understand the interests and actions of national “states”, a more precise account of the interests of government actors and agencies is needed, placing the usefulness of the term “state” itself in question (Hagmann & Péclard, 2010; cf Cirolia & Harber, 2022). We situate these concerns in relation to the broader transcalar political formations shaping urban development (Halbert & Rouanet, 2014; Robinson et al., 2022). The case of the GARID project in Accra suggests that both urban development politics and international urban policy need to account for the role of central government if they are to inform urgently needed initiatives to address the dangerous deficits in resilient urban infrastructure in many urban areas.

## **Transcalarity and state agency in urban development**

Given severe infrastructure deficits, African cities are often presented as emerging markets and/or frontiers for initiatives seeking to draw in private sector finance alongside multilateral development aid (Doucette & Sial, 2020; Goodfellow, 2020; Mawdsley, 2016;

Watson, 2014). Mawdsley (2016) describes this kind of financial mobilization through a diversity of local and global financial actors as hybrid state-led financialization. Some have argued that this has opened new investment vehicles and spatial fixes for speculative development, including “green structural adjustments” targeting city governments (Bigger & Webber, 2021; Mawdsley, 2015). Differences in financial instruments (e.g. bonds, loans, ODA, grant, Government investment, mortgages) and in the objectives of different actors complicate this narrative, but it is certainly possible in a global sense, and to a greater extent than before, to treat urban infrastructure as a financial asset (Fernandez & Aalbers, 2019; Mawdsley, 2016). Questions remain, though, as to whether such private sector global development finance is in fact being mobilized in African contexts – reviews of progress to date would suggest not (Attridge & Gouett, 2021). Focusing on financialization as a global process to explain urban outcomes remains an incomplete analysis.

World Bank and other developmental and sovereign global actors offering aid and concessional financing therefore remain the key investors in resilient programs and projects, particularly in African cities (Haas et al., 2024; Milhorange & Soule-Kohndou, 2017). Analyses of these globalized urban development circuits (e.g. SDGs, City Resilience Programs, etc.) have emphasized a policy architecture aiming to produce cities as investment sites through building municipal government capacities (Bigger & Webber, 2021; Croese & Parnell, 2022). These link the (resilient) infrastructure push by the World Bank and other global players to a wider agenda of urban and/or municipal “structural adjustment” to produce new geographies of rent extraction and financialization (Castree & Christophers, 2015; Grubbauer & Hilbrandt, 2023; Harris & Fabricius, 1996; Mawdsley, 2016) as well as to integrate peripheral regions into global value chains (Kanai & Schindler, 2019) and to export urbanism or urbanization models (Doucette & Sial, 2020). Thus, unlike earlier Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) where development actors imposed a set of reforms on national governments through conditionality-laden policy measures, recent resilience initiatives (e.g. Global Climate Finance, City Resilience Program, City Creditworthiness initiatives) are seen as imposing a set of reforms on city government to enable more private sector investment e.g. through municipal bonds, entailing the enhancement of financial, legal and administrative procedures.

However, rather than the reformatting of municipal government to attract private investment, in the case we present here we observe the reinforcement of strongly national government-centric institutions for urban development, and a concentration of the control of urban-related financial flows in central government ministries (Croese & Kombe, 2024; Robinson et al., 2024). In the most general terms, interventions on the part of international actors in particular urban contexts do not constitute a mechanical process. As Pierre (2011, p. 139) observes, there are decisions, negotiations and choices that state institutions make since “government has not left the process of governing”. So, while global development actors and policies are important for (re)making African cities resilient, they are certainly not the only actors driving UID (re)formation. International policy initiatives are not simply rolled out across different contexts – national governments are key in this process, not least because of international protocols governing both developmental and sovereign to sovereign negotiations over investments (Robinson et al., 2024).

Thus, while urban governance is by no means the exclusive realm of state actors (Hagmann & Péclard, 2010; Lund, 2006; Stacey & Lund, 2016), some urban studies scholars have recently emphasized the important role of national government in urban development (Brenner, 2019; Cox, 2017; Gastrow, 2020; Goodfellow, 2022; Shatkin, 2022). Certainly, national governments are strongly implicated in the global development circuits associated with infrastructure production (Asante & Helbrecht, 2022; Cirolia & Harber, 2022; Robinson et al., 2024; Shatkin, 2022). Shatkin (2022) suggests that national governments can capitalize on or leverage the competition between globalized financial and development actors to either establish their own power and sovereignty or to redirect the investment priorities of global development players. This observation reflects contexts with strong central government institutions and relatively effective decentralized approaches to local development and infrastructure delivery. This contrasts with the experiences of African urban development with fractured (fiscal) authority, weakly implemented decentralization, and dual land authority systems (Cirolia, 2020; Owusu, 2015). These limit government's ability to dictate infrastructure expenditures and priorities in general, and significantly undermine local government capacity to contribute to these developments. In such contexts, neither local government nor transnational donors/lenders can act in isolation but both depend on national government actors to bring forward development. One result is that transnational actors are often strongly embedded in different contexts (Croese & Kombe, 2024; Croese & Miyauchi, 2023), forming what Peters (2020) describes as “in-country implementation agents” to advance infrastructure investments. “Transnational” actors are therefore made up at least partly through their participation in specific located communities of practice.

State actors, alongside transnational organizations and a wide range of non-state actors, are therefore together involved in drawing a myriad of technical and managerial resources from near and far to facilitate investment (Gabor, 2021; Halbert & Rouanet, 2014). To expand understanding of these processes, we build on the concept of transcalarity to foreground the cross-scalar and multi-actor dimensions of urban planning and development processes (see Robinson et al., 2022, p. 2024). Transforming urban territories, Halbert and Rouanet (2014) argue, cannot be regarded seamlessly as a mere product of globalization, neoliberalism and/or transnationalism, but is actively performed by transcalar territorial networks (TTN) that constellate around designated urban projects and programs. Thus, in addition to state institutions and donors, TTNs can include:

... real estate agencies, lawyers, solicitors, developers, architects, contractors, builders, realtors, land consolidators, middlemen, enforcers, landowners, local panchayat [banks], metropolitan and federal state governments, and in some cases, central government. (...) [T]he key is to understand the work that TTN performs and what it accomplishes for FFIs [Foreign Finance Investments]. The first obvious answer is that the TTN provides the technical skills and human resources necessary to convert a plot of land into an office block or shopping mall. (Halbert & Rouanet, 2014, p. 477)

TTNs *perform* certain technical and human resource roles that are necessary for the “landing”, “fixing” and “de-risking” of mobile finance and developmental capital in place. This way of thinking also inevitably challenges conventional understandings of the urban based on an idealized view of city-ness as territorially bounded space

(Brenner & Schmid, 2014), and of scale as a nested (albeit shifting) hierarchy of power relations (Brenner, 2004; Howitt, 2002). Rather, different circuits with more complex spatialities, cutting across different “scalar” arrangements, may be shaping urban development processes (Leitner & Sheppard, 2020; Peck, 2017; Robinson et al., 2024).

Transcality reinforces the idea that “stateness” needs to be seen as an emergent achievement rather than a privileged or even necessary characteristic of government institutions and actors (Hagmann & Péclard, 2010; Lund, 2006; Stacey & Lund, 2016). We disagree that this involves an excessive widening of the net of actors considered crucial in urban development processes (Cirolia & Harber, 2022). Rather, TTNs expand attention to the agency of an emergent configuration of a diversity of actors across putative scales (not just state-craft within or between the national state or municipal government). Different actors come together to co-produce and govern the territories of projects despite their varied formal institutional location, reach or scope (Allen & Cochrane, 2007). We suggest that it is the power relations amongst the actors who together shape the emergent institutional and spatial formations across which negotiations of such decisions occur, that could be a helpful focus of analytical attention and policy concern.

In addition to insisting on stateness as an emergent, multi-actor formation, African studies has brought to the fore the historical diversity of state forms (Herbst, 2000), as well as the question as to whether government actors are involved in “state”-related activities, or governing (Bayart, 2009). Rather than seeing “the state” as a self-evident formation, understood as a (varied) institutional expression of wider socio-economic formations shaped by strategic selectivity and scalar reconfigurations (Jessop, 2008), scholars of African politics have brought to the fore the multiple forms of power and interest operating in and through the terrain of government institutions which seem to place the very idea of “stateness” in question. Tom Goodfellow (2022, p. 20) observes that in many African contexts, “political power recurrently subverts the formal instituted order of governance.” Thus, in addition to the potential to promote developmental agendas, government is also a site for creative arrangements for personal wealth accumulation (Anders, 2002; Chinsinga, 2018; Chipkin et al., 2018; Hibou, 1999), securing party financing and hegemony in sometimes highly competitive electoral environments, such as in Ghana (Hickey & Sen, 2024; Olver, 2020; Paller, 2019), and competitive and selective promotion of certain government institutions (Robinson et al., 2024). Also important are the uneven capacities of different state entities and agencies – as Hickey (2023) observes, state institutions in a context like Ghana are highly variable, spanning the spectrum of probity and effectiveness which might characterize contexts like Belgium as well as Mozambique. In some contexts, Pritchett et al. (2013) observe that “looking like a state” may be more important, particularly to securing external investment, than building the capacity to govern.

Thus, the nature of neither “state” nor government can be assumed. If, in many cases, government actors’ interests in governing are deflected or strongly mediated by other interests and institutions, understandings of the nature of “state” agency in urban development need to be rethought. Thus, it is also “(not) the state” which needs analytical articulation – those activities and interests which occupy the terrain of government without contributing to stateness. In this paper, we observe that the interests of central







the GARID project was initiated in 2019 to address the city's resilience troubles, particularly for communities within GAMA's Odaw River Basin (ORB). It is believed that 60 percent of the population of the GAMA resides in the ORB catchment area with Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) and Ga-East Municipal Assembly occupying about 65 percent of the ORB area (Ackom et al., 2020; Ntjahl et al., 2022).

This study aims to contribute to debates about how transnational, state and non-state actors are implicated in urban development processes. To do this, data collection during the research was based on multiple qualitative sources. Primary sources of data were derived from in-depth interviews, informal conversations, field notes, observation, a participatory workshop, and three focus group discussions (FDGs) within the communities earmarked for upgrading under the GARID project, namely Alogboshie, Akweteyman and Nima. Secondary sources of data came from an analysis of World Bank and GARID project documents retrieved from Web pages. In all, 53 participants were recruited through non-probability sampling methods for in-depth interviews and 25 participants for the participatory workshop together with the three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

Participants for the in-depth interviews comprised World Bank consultants, ministries, departments and project coordinating units connected to GARID, as well as other institutions and actors such as the Water Resource Commission, traditional councils, local community leaders, affected persons and assembly members<sup>1</sup>. Interviews averaged between 45 and 60 min and were audio recorded based on informed consent and later transcribed. The transcribed interviews were coded manually and analysed thematically. The section that follows discusses long-standing concerns with flooding in Accra and recurrent investment failures.

## History of Accra's floods and recurrent investment failures

The GARID project is not the first to address Accra's flood resilience troubles. Perennial flooding has been an annual concern of communities and state actors in Accra since the 1930s (Amoako & Boamah, 2015). As many as 15 deadly flood-related disasters were recorded in Accra between 1991 and 2014 (Amoako, 2017; Amoako & Boamah, 2015; Daily Graphic, 2015; Owusu & Obour, 2020). For instance, between 1955 and 1997 properties worth over US\$30 million were destroyed, 100 lives were lost and 10,000 people were rendered homeless either during or immediately after flood events (Amoako & Boamah, 2015), whereas between 2000–2012, properties worth over US\$43.7 million were destroyed, 83 lives were lost and about 178,750 people were displaced (ibid.). Others similarly recount that about 243 mm of rainfall in 5 h was recorded on July 3, 1995, and about 156 mm of rainfall in less than 10 h on May 18, 2008, and October 25, 2011 (Daily Graphic, 2015; Owusu & Obour, 2020). As described by our informants, the traumatic nature of local flooding often left several parts of the city in ruin and further marginalized residents of informal settlements. Sometimes, community actors have had to exercise their agency in decision-making and in activism when government institutions fail to provide the needed infrastructure (see also Agyei-Mensah et al., 2024; Stacey & Lund, 2016). In Akweteyman, one of the communities where GARID has planned interventions, a former assemblyman recounted how:

Anytime it rained heavily, people would be washed away. Several occasions. Even recently, a woman and a 4-year child all died, they were living in a kiosk and the flood took the kiosk away and they died. That was two years ago. Around that time, they [local government] had not constructed the road between Kpovy and Achimota. There is a big drain there, so anytime it rains heavily vehicles cannot cross to Achimota. So, during my time [as assembly-man], I did some two bridges on my own and people were using it but when it rains heavily sometimes it will wash away (ACCCOM41, 28/08/22).

In our interviews, many argued that the city's flood vulnerability is deeply connected to its topographical nature, poor drainage channel maintenance and the occupation of floodplains due to rapid urbanization. Weak planning and development control partly inherited from colonial times and deeply embedded in the family and stool-based land allocation are shaping the rapid physical expansion of post-colonial Accra (Paller, 2019). Experts point to weak leadership at local government level, as well as the attitude of the city authorities and some members of the general public toward solid waste management (Abraham et al., 2006; Ngnenbe, 2022; World Bank, 2017a). Certainly, river mouths and some drainage canals have become completely clogged with solid waste with devastating impacts on the poorest communities (Owusu, 2010; see Figure 2).

Accra's governance and financing arrangements also determine when and how infrastructure investments are secured and used. For example, by the time of the June 3rd 2015 twin disaster of fire and flooding which caused the death of over 150 Ghanaians, and the destruction of properties totalling US\$55 million with rebuilding costs of US



**Figure 2.** Choked drainage system in one of the GARID case study communities. Source: Fieldwork (2024).

\$105 million (Amoako, 2017; World Bank, 2017a), many had expected that the city mayor would have already fixed flood-prone Accra given the international investments received toward city resilience (Yeebo, 2015). Table 1 documents a series of investments which were supposed to have solved Accra's flood resilience troubles before the June 3rd disaster.

For example, the Korle Lagoon Ecological Restoration Project (KLERP I & II) was supposed to dredge and restore the Korle and Odaw lagoons, and the Accra Metropolitan Assembly's Urban Environmental Sanitation Project and the US\$650 million Accra Sanitary Sewer Stormwater Drainage Alleviation (ASSSDA) Project were supposed to address the flooding by dredging and renovating all nine river basins in GAMA (see Table 1). For the ASSSDA project, Yeebo (2015) reports that two different Chinese companies had started work on two different wastewater treatment plants when the project stalled due to an economic crisis which resulted in the late submission of the loan application by the mayor of Accra – even though the US-Exim Bank and Standard Chartered Bank had earlier indicated their willingness to support the project. Additionally, the city's complex urban management system limits effective intersectoral collaboration and coordination:

... [T]he arguments were that these things [infrastructural projects] were done in silos and were not coordinated so it is not multi-sectoral. So, if it was the Ministry of Environment, they are doing their thing. If it is the Ministry of Works and Housing, they are doing their thing. What GARID brought was to make all these things multi-sectoral. (ACCWB2, 17/04/2023)

The failure of previous urban resilience projects is also partly a result of the nature of the financial tool associated with many government investments. As a rule, contractors must secure their own finance and implement the project in advance of state reimbursement (known as “pre-financing”):

In the past dredging has been pre-financed by private individuals and when someone is pre-financing he tends to give [set] the conditions [and] the profits margins are what determines the kind of negotiations (...) but where we have the World Bank financing then it's now easy to have the specifications that maximize the benefits for the beneficiary communities because nobody is pre-financing so there is no issue of profit margins. (ACCPCU20, 23/08/2022)

Private sector pre-financing is inevitable within the Ghanaian context as local government budgetary allocations are usually paid late and are inadequate. However, the KLERP project exemplifies how well-funded large-scale projects may also fail because of the lack of a socially inclusive approach to eviction and demolition of structures in project-affected areas. Accra has over the years witnessed “politically-induced displacements” which have often led to resistance and even violent contestations (Crentsil & Owusu, 2018; Gillespie, 2016). One informant recalled that: “*there were structures along those drains [Odaw] that they [city authorities] were to demolish but they were unable to do so because they did not work with the relevant stakeholders* (ACCCOM41, 28/08/22).” As argued by Abraham et al. (2006), restoring a disturbed natural ecosystem needs an integrated approach due to the sensitive nature of issues relating to resettlement and livelihood disruption associated with such projects. Some removals have been highly contested, such as those of the “Making Accra Work Again” initiative led by Greater

**Table 1.** Overview of transnational investments (1995–2025) towards GAMA's resilience.

Duration	Project Name	Description	Budget (Million)	Funder(s)	Implementing actors	Technical actors/ consultants	Reference URL
1995–1999	Korle Lagoon Ecological Restoration Project (KLERP) (Phase I)	To correct, dredge and restore the Korle and Odaw lagoons	US\$ 37.7	Government, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and Arab Bank for Economic	Hydrological Department under MWH	Dredge Masters, a wholly Ghanaian construction firm	<a href="https://bit.ly/38faLH5">https://bit.ly/38faLH5</a>
2000–2008	KLERP Phase II		US\$ 26.14	Development in Africa			<a href="https://bit.ly/3UDCAzE">https://bit.ly/3UDCAzE</a>
2008–2010	Dredging in the Chemu under the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) Second Urban Environmental Sanitation Project II (USEP II)	Improving the Chemu drainage system	US\$13	World Bank	MLGRD	Messrs DHV Int (UK), Water Tech Ghana Ltd	<a href="https://rb.gy/xz7rmo">https://rb.gy/xz7rmo</a>
2011–2018	Local Government Capacity Support Project	To strengthen local government institutions for improved service delivery	US\$ 175	World Bank	MLGRD	Regional Technical Advisor Team and World Bank's Institutional Development Consultants	<a href="https://bit.ly/3h2NT6Z">https://bit.ly/3h2NT6Z</a>
2012	Accra Sanitary Sewer Stormwater Drainage Alleviation Project	Dredging and renovating the Odaw, Lafaa, Chemu, Kpeshie, Osu-Klottey, Morkwei, La, Songor and Korle Lagoons.	US\$ 650	US EXIM Bank and Standard Chartered Bank	MWH	Conti Infrastructure Company, US based construction firm	<a href="https://bit.ly/3h4Wjux">https://bit.ly/3h4Wjux</a>
2013–2018	GAMA Sanitation and Water Project	Improved sanitation and water supply	US\$ 150	World Bank	MSWR		<a href="https://bit.ly/3VX9e0w">https://bit.ly/3VX9e0w</a>
2020	The Nima Storm Drain Project	To design and construct drainage and ancillary sewage system from Kawukudi to the Odaw River Basin in Accra	€102	Government and Standard Chartered Bank, London	MWH,	Queiroz Galvao, the Brazilian Construction Company	<a href="https://rb.gy/0p2e0f">https://rb.gy/0p2e0f</a>
2019–2025	Greater Accra Resilient and Integrated Development project	Project aims to improve flood risk in the Odaw basin. Phase 2 and 3 aims to scale up other priority basins	US\$ 350	World Bank	MWH, MLGRD, MSWR	HKV (Netherlands), SWS Consulting Engineers (Italian firm), Dredge Masters, etc.	<a href="https://rb.gy/edf9cd">https://rb.gy/edf9cd</a> <a href="https://shorturl.at/32HQN">https://shorturl.at/32HQN</a>

Source: compiled by Authors.

Accra's former regional minister, Henry Quartey, which involved the violent removal of slum dwellers and unauthorized traders from the main streets of Accra, including displacement of over 5,000 onion sellers and scrap dealers from the riverside [Odaw] close to the city center (see Graphic Online, 2022). It was therefore important for GARID to carefully consider the concerns of affected residents as confrontation could undermine the project (ACCPCU17, 17/08/2022). The path-dependent experiences of displacement strongly influenced the form and focus of this World Bank project. The section that follows traces in detail the emergence of the GARID project.

## Tracing Garid: an emergent transcalar formation

### *Early decisions and related institutions*

The formation of GARID is deeply rooted in the June 3rd 2015 twin disaster of fire and flooding. As one informant explained, *"once the Red Cross signals that there is this big disaster and then donors would also see from within their own portfolios which arm best supports this and then they engage with government"* (ACCPCU15, 05/08/2022). It is believed that together with the volume of rain received, the related fire outbreak made this one of the most destructive in the history of Accra. It was also seen as an indication of the city's limited resilient infrastructure and unpreparedness:

It was not the highest volume of rain we have had or precipitation we have had in this country except that the infrastructure was incapable of conveying it. That is what led to the flooding and destruction [on June 3rd]. (ACCPCU15, 05/08/2022)

Due to the widespread public concern about the massive nature of the disaster, the number of lives lost and the cost of rebuilding the devastated city, the government itself quickly assembled relevant high-level state institutions to identify the causes of the disaster to the media and the general public, and also to pull together other actors and resources necessary for rebuilding the devastated city (ACCSA10, 13/04/2023). After the initial assessment was done by the then Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology (MEST)<sup>2</sup>, key decisions regarding where to seek funding and which department was to lead the state delegation after the disaster were all carried out by state actors at the inter-ministerial level, mostly through formal procedures. However, as one informant observed, the Town and Country Planning Department [TCPD], an agency under the MEST at the time,

was asked to prepare a presentation so that once it is done the minister could call for a press conference (...). But at a point when we [TCPD] were ready to go and do the presentation, the minister said he is in touch with the World Bank. So (...) instead of doing the press conference, we will go to the World Bank and make that presentation if they could also have some support for the government. So, we finished the presentation at the ministry and the next one was to take place at the World Bank office. (ACCSA10, 13/04/2023)

Some decisions were therefore initiated by individuals as in the case of this minister who used a prior relationship with the World Bank (hereafter the Bank) to seek support. This led to a series of early meetings between national government actors and World Bank consultants at the Bank's country office. MESTI exercised its leadership as the ministry in charge of environmental issues but was later considered by the Bank as not the appropriate ministry to lead on GARID implementation due to the number of infrastructural



works involved (ACCWB1, 4/08/2022). This decision came at a later stage when many other actors, such as the Ministry of Works and Housing (MWH), Ministry of Sanitation, Water and Resources (MSWR) and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD), had been drawn into the network as a result of their institutional mandates. One of the World Bank's Ghanaian consultants recalls the inter-ministerial competition to lead the initiative. LUSPA, for example, was asked to lead on an early

multi-stakeholder diagnostics where all the relevant ministries had to come on board to assess their sectors. (...). By the time we finished the project, (...) the only thing LUSPA could do is the planning regulations and the policy part of it. So, the implementation of the project left their hands. These are the kinds of struggles we are talking about. They gave birth to the project but by the time the project ended, their role was gone – it is like you didn't get your child. (ACCWB2, 17042023)

At this stage, decisions regarding the procedure through which the GARID project was to be formed were placed beyond direct state control as the Bank required that a City Strength Diagnostics (CSD), “*a qualitative methodological tool*” used to identify a host of shocks and stresses facing cities, be applied (ACCWB1, 4/08/2022):

We did the presentation at the World Bank office, at that time they connected [virtually] to Washington DC and other experts were also listening. (...). [F]rom there, they [World Bank] said no, for them to come in and provide support, we should request for city strength diagnostics. So that based on that, they can have justification for the support ... (ACCSA10, 13042023)

This was partly because earlier policies, such as the 2012 National Urban Policy or the 2015 Bank's urbanization review report on Ghana, had not discussed resilience. Consequently, in May 2017, the Bank with financial assistance from the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) developed the CSD report. This provided strategic direction for resilient urban development in GAMA, raised awareness around GAMA's resilience issues and facilitated informed decisions regarding the nature of GARID. For example, it unveiled how inter-jurisdictional coordination could be experimented with in GAMA to mitigate the impact of flooding, which became a hallmark of GARID operations.

The methodological tool (i.e. the CSD), developed by the Bank's staff with support from the GFDRR in 2014, had been first piloted in two cities, namely, Can Tho (Vietnam) and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) (World Bank, 2017b)<sup>3</sup>. The Bank's own success story in the use of CSD in these two cities influenced its uptake in Accra and its use as the basis for project formation. However, in principle, the government also retained the power to reject this analytical approach to project formation (ACCWB1, 4/08/2022). Some have critiqued the Bank's analytical-based lending model as being often too self-referential (Ravallion, 2016), yet this analytical work in Accra would not have been possible without the participation of an extended network of government and non-governmental actors. The CSD relied on a national cross-sectoral and inter-ministerial approach in which a large steering committee along with a team of transnational technocrats and consultants produced the report, drawing on numerous Ghana and Accra-based experts (including one of our authors), which eventually led to the co-evolution of the GARID flagship project. Government actors contributed extensively



through the provision and analysis of contextual data, reviewing reports, and attending project conceptualization meetings along with the Bank's consultants, as one ministerial official recalled:

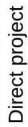
I joined in 2017 when I began attending meetings through the conceptualization to the development of the project [GARID] itself. So, while the consultant, HKV [a Dutch consultancy firm], finished their work, the report was brought in for us [Ghana Water Resource Commission] to review and then see whether the World Bank can support funding to implement the measures they recommended. (ACCSA5, 27/10/2022)

Thus, the CSD exercise required the assembling of numerous national expert consultants and government actors to contribute to, engage with and critique reports of the Bank's selected international "expert development consultants". One noted that without this extensive support it would have taken months to acquire the level of knowledge they gained (ACCW1, 4/08/2022). These intertwined relationships among the different actors shaped the global actor's investment priorities. However, while national government actors interacted closely with global development players in this preparatory period, city or municipal governments were relatively sidelined both then and in subsequent phases. This is partly a result of the arrangements for financing urban development projects.

### ***Assembling finance: central control within Ghana's decentralised system of governance***

In Ghana, all large-scale infrastructure loans are secured and/or approved by central government (Asante & Helbrecht, 2022; Loubere, 2018) which does not allow for direct sub-national borrowing from bilateral and multilateral development institutions like the World Bank, even though Ghana practices a decentralized system of governance (Asante, 2020; Otoo & Danquah, 2021; Owusu, 2015). Although in theory city authorities have responsibility for the development of infrastructures in jurisdictions under their supervision, it is the central government that leverages development finance and decides how to use the funds and where the investments should go. In many contexts, city authorities and their networks are appointed by Presidents to ensure that they remain loyal to central government agendas (Soule, 2019). This creates a scenario in Ghana which some argue makes decentralization purely ideological with little practical autonomy for local government (Asante, 2020). Under such a weak local government system, national government institutions emerge as the key actors in urban development, authorizing large-scale infrastructure financing, and regulating the financial conduct of city authorities.

It is only in relation to very small scale, not-for-profit developments that donors (particularly, communities, NGOs and private individuals) can contribute directly to local communities for developmental projects (Owusu, 2004). Owusu and Obour (2020) observed how communities mobilized funds to dredge minor drainage channels to reduce perennial flooding, for example (see also Agyei-Mensah et al., 2024; Grant et al., 2019). Within Ghana's decentralized model (see Figure 3), city governments may generate funding for modest UID through sources such as the District Assembly Common Fund (DACF), public-private partnerships (PPPs), central government and/or donor investments. In the isolated instances where city authorities have secured



**Figure 3.** Actors shaping the formation of development projects in Ghana. Source: Authors' construct.

concessional loans (for example, from the Chinese government for market redevelopment in Ghana's Cape Coast Metropolis), the central government provides the necessary guarantees for that loan acquisition and repayment (Asante & Helbrecht, 2022).

Thus, while central government undertakes some fiscal decentralization (5% of national revenue goes to city authorities), the fiscal and institutional structures provide very limited freedom, with a vertical imbalance of power and resources in favor of the central government (Owusu, 2004; Shand, 2019). All loans are received by the central government through the Ministry of Finance (MoF) before funds trickle down to local government actors through centralized disbursement systems:

... The ministry of finance is the official interlocutor with the World Bank because any loan or credit goes on the books of the country. And in Ghana, you don't have what is called sub-national lending so the bank cannot lend to a city or province (...) all the loan is through the ministry of finance which is largely a political process that is underpinned with analytical work. (ACCWB1, 4/08/2022)

Even in the GARID project which is being implemented in 17 Metropolitan and Municipal District Assemblies (MMDAs), the city authorities have to date been barely involved in the various processes of formation, financing and decision-making. It was the central government that embarked on a search for funding in the aftermath of the June 3rd

disaster. This had some constraints, however, since “... *a lot of the donors don’t do infrastructure, particularly in areas such as drainage [compared to roads] due to the high capital cost*” (ACCPCU20, 23/08/2022). Possible sources of funding (sovereign fund, community, private funds, multilateral development bank, NGO, etc.) are determined by the nature of the investment required (e.g. drainage, road, school, etc.) and the nature of the development challenge (e.g. large or small-scale).

Fiscal and technical resources were therefore assembled from diverse transnational sources at the early stages of GARID. For instance, the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs supported the project’s preparation during the initial CSD phase whereas the Dutch Government supported the project team with a total amount of US\$1 million to undertake a feasibility study of applying performance-based contracting (PBC) in the dredging of the Odaw River Basin. The willingness and heterogeneity of resource providers in the early phase of project formation made state actors optimistic that they would secure the USD\$750 million needed to develop a one-in-50-year flood protection infrastructure design. But this did not materialize. Instead, an initial World Bank loan of USD\$200 included a donor-recipient agreement stipulating that scaling up the project to other basins would be on condition that GARID could implement the project in the Odaw basin within the agreed schedule.

Currently, there is no co-financing for the GARID project, which relied entirely on the US\$200 million World Bank IDA funding until, in May 2024 additional World Bank loan funding of US\$150 million was approved by Ghana’s parliament. The loan was secured by MESTI through the Ministry of Finance (MoF), with funds trickling down to other central government ministries and city government through secured and supervised centralized disbursement systems such as the Client Connection System (CCS) and the Ghana Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS)<sup>4</sup>, both developed under the World Bank’s 2006 eGhana project. These reflect robust efforts by international donors in Ghana as in other contexts to safeguard against financial irregularities and corruption (Appiah & Abdulai, 2017; Chasukwa & Banik, 2019; Hickey, 2023).

As the official interlocutor with the World Bank, the MoF has the oversight responsibility to sign for loans, monitor and review funds disbursement, report financial anomalies, approve centralized online fund allocations through CCS and GIFMIS, as well as provide advice for the best financing options available to complement project funds (ACCPCU21, 12/08/2022). This role is executed along with others such as the chief director of the project-leading ministry (MWH) which also doubles as the GARID project director. One of the project’s coordinating officers revealed the powerful role of the MoF:

... [I]f we say we are going for about US\$ 75 million [from Green Climate Fund], the MoF can say, no, looking at the debt portfolio, they don’t think we [GARID] can go and add additional debt so cannot take that one. There is nothing we can do about it. (ACCPCU15, 05/08/2022)

The MoF has a close relationship and long history of engagement with the World Bank and leads financial negotiations along with other national state actors such as the Attorney General, a technical team who are consultants at the GARID Project Coordinating Unit (PCU) and the Ministers of the three project implementing ministries (MWH, MSWR and MLGRD). MESTI was left out after initially leading the project preparation

(ACCSA8, 07/04/2023). The section that follows probes more closely the relationship between Ghanaian government actors and the World Bank and how this shaped GARID.

### ***GARID concept formation: a “negotiated iterative process”***

The World Bank and central government actors co-produced all project documents, while the initial analytical CSD requested by the World Bank was informed by many government officials. This included the GARID concept note and appraisal document which embodies the scope of the project, financial disbursement, social and environmental safeguards, as well as resettlement action plans. The project’s concept note was borne out of several technical meetings between the World Bank team and the national government negotiation team before more information regarding the project’s economic, social and environmental viability was gathered for a pre-appraisal meeting (ACCSA8, 07/04/2023). For the national government team, participation was led by a Schedule Officer from the World Bank desk within the MoF and the three implementing ministries (each represented by a focal person), among other relevant technical agencies and departments. The negotiation team can expand to include relevant additional actors (e.g. lawyers from the attorney general’s office) to ensure that the lending project is consistent with government financial policy and country partnership framework (ACCSA8, 07/04/2023). The MoF’s Schedule Officer acted as a liaison “*between the project and the World Bank and between the project and the Government of Ghana*”, and also assembled relevant actors for negotiations, making sure that the loan is consistent with the Country Partnership Framework and Public Financial Policy, among other technical work (ACCSA8, 07/04/2023). She also managed the everyday administrative work. During the negotiation stage, these national actors strongly influenced the terms and conditions of the lending project using their institutional powers:

So, we have the financial agreement (...) If you don’t agree with it and you think that the interest rate they are charging you is too huge, maybe you want it to be lowered and all that. But when it comes to the project itself sometimes there are some legal covenants that may be against the policies of Ghana. Then you say no, this is against the policy of Ghana ... (ACCSA8, 07/04/2023)

Thus, although GARID was born out of the crisis response to the flood and the Bank’s subsequent analytical approach, government actors retained control over what the project entailed and how they wished it to proceed. The Bank’s team was led by a Task Team Leader (TTL), a specialist in urban management, while the Country Director served as meeting chair, with various technical peer reviewers and appointed expert consultants from Ghana, Washington and elsewhere. It has been suggested that there is increasing participation of the Bank’s expert development consultants in large-scale project formation due to its complex regulatory frameworks and perceived deficiencies in African governance systems (Ravallion, 2016). This, some have argued, magnifies the powers of the Bank and decapacitates in-country government actors (Ravallion, 2016). But, as revealed in the GARID case, these processes involved a host of national government actors as well as nationally based consultants and researchers. One of the World Bank consultants explained the complex internal and external project formation processes and decision reviews as follows:

So like, [the TTL] would come with at least three peer reviewers, technical peer reviewers and then other important kinds of people within the bank. So, like safeguards, like environmental and social and it's a discussion about this concept. (...) [A]nd then, the team leader has to go back to the government and say we had a concept review, people brought up some really important and valuable comments and so this is what we would like to do, what and how would you like to proceed, and then they [World Bank and government of Ghana] work together. But it's really like what I said earlier, it's a negotiated iterative process ... (ACCWB1, 4/08/2022)

In their role as a liaison between the World Bank team and the government team, TTLs engage with multiple actors on both sides to develop an agreement on the project documentation, which can take anything from a day to weeks (ACCWB1, 4/08/2022). This overall concept review stage can last between five to six months before it is ready for appraisal since it involves a constellation of actors with varying interests and expectations. For example, a member of the Ghana national government team, also a hydraulic engineer, recalled moments when a proposal regarding the redesigning of the Odaw River Basin (ORB) to enable land value capture was rejected by the government's technical team:

Some decisions were rejected because of basically funding. (...) There were suggestions to design it [the Odaw] properly to pay for whatever cost [of] investment you have done. So, the suggestion was, can we cover it (...) so that the lagoon will flow under into the sea (...) then what we have now covered, the top, now becomes the very high prime land that we have captured, and we can put all manner of facilities on it. (ACCSA5, 27/10/2022)

Another example of negotiation concerned financing the costs of resettlement, which is not normally included within World Bank project loans. But after extensive discussion, the bank allowed GARID to use part of the loan to cover the cost of compensation for those who would be affected by the project. A key informant further recalls that the emergency economic situation caused by COVID meant that the MoF insisted on diverting about \$65 million of the GARID loan to respond to this crisis under the Contingent Emergency Response Component (CERC) agreed with the World Bank and included in the Project Appraisal Document (ACCPCU17, 17/08/2022; also see Osei, 2024). The lending project was considered appraised when there was an "*absence of objection*" from the government and World Bank teams (ACCWB1, 4/08/2022).

Even though the ultimate decision to approve the project appraisal resides with the Bank, national government actors have considerable influence during its preparation and still hold the power to either accept or reject the Bank's terms and conditions (ACCWB1, 4/08/2022). At the end of this lengthy process, the Bank's team seeks project appraisal approval from their boardroom in Washington D.C, whereas the government team seeks approval of the appraisal document from cabinet and parliament to proceed to the next stage which signifies their readiness to sign the financial agreement before proceeding to project implementation (ACCSA8, 07/04/2023).

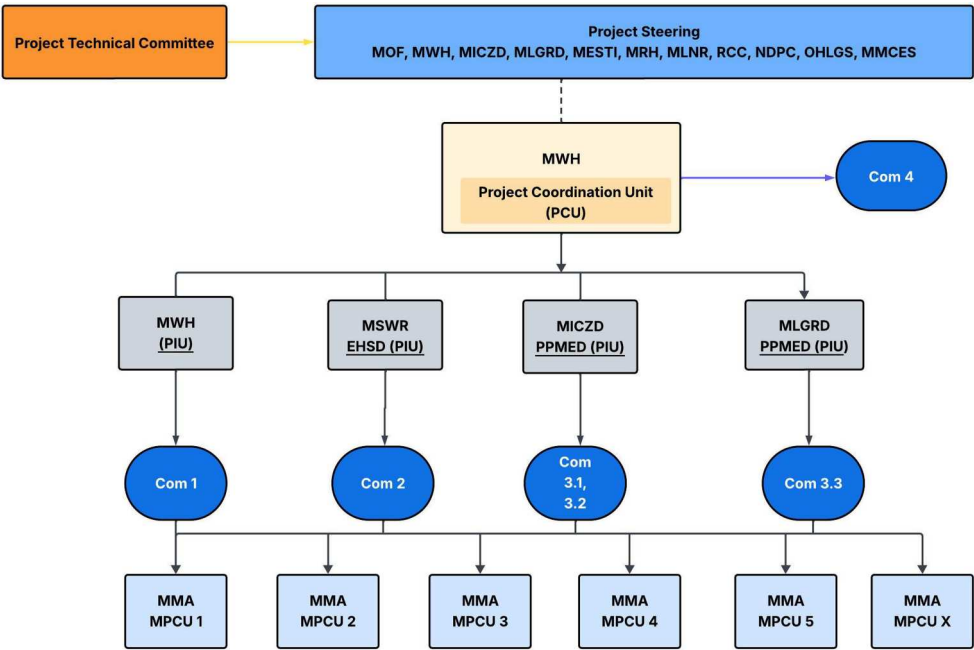
The GARID financial and project agreement involved a wide network of actors, including lawyers, engineers, consultants, technical staff, representatives from the MoF, the Schedule Officer and the TTL, whose collective responsibility is to "get the project right" in concept and in scope. Following these carefully crafted processes, from the early engagements in June 2015, the financial agreement for the GARID

appraisal document, which was approved in May 2019, was signed in January 2020 for the implementation of the GARID project.

**Community agency in an emergent transcalar territorial network**

GARID’s organogram (see Figure 4) shows that the multitude of central government actors who had been leading contextual analysis and negotiations regarding financing and designing this large-scale UID were also closely involved in its implementation, making it at times cumbersome and costly to reach decisions and take action (Sheburah Essien, *Forthcoming*).

While this reinforces our understanding of the powerful position of central government in urban infrastructure development (Robinson et al., 2024), it is important to also note the role of actors outside of government in shaping the project design, and on whom the success of the project depends. As experienced urban development practitioners, some key actors in the PCU were very familiar with the history of poor consultation in Accra’s urban development processes and with the strenuous opposition to and contestation of urban infrastructure-related displacement which followed. In response, GARID drew strongly on community-based actors and experts to steer the project through its implementation phases (ACCPCU17, 17/08/2022). This included the formation of Community Development Committees (CDCs) to represent the different project affected persons within the communities where infrastructure was to be developed; the appointment of Community Liaison Officers (CLO) to negotiate with affected people; and a Resettlement Implementation Committee (RIC) to oversee



**Figure 4.** GARID organization structure for implementation. Source: Drawn from World Bank (2019, p. 72).



arrangements for any displaced residents (Sheburah Essien, [forthcoming](#)) and to assist the Social Safeguard Specialists with Resettlement Action Plans (RAP).

The RIC brings on board the resources to ensure the project lands safely in the affected areas and to ensure that affected persons are resettled and all grievances relating to RAP are adequately addressed on behalf of the GARID team. This is seen as essential to project success (ACCCOM42, 30/08/2023). In this regard, the CLOs had long expertise in community engagement in the areas where GARID investments were planned and could “*serve as a link between the project and the people*” (ACCCOM42, 30/08/2023). Many of the CLOs had been involved in previous donor projects and also had skills and expertise to facilitate the work of consultants and engineers. In addition, in order to ground and promote GARID’s idea of resilience as inclusiveness, community-based committees, notably the CDCs, were formed in all three GARID communities through nominations by relevant stakeholders of representatives to lead community engagements. These consist of about “*10-15 people who are the mouthpiece of the community to push for issues of the community’s interest*” (ACCPCU15, 05/08/2022). They comprise representatives of the various categories of community residents, such as the assemblymen, market women, people with disabilities (PWDs) and religious leaders, whose relationships with the wider community were seen as essential to project success:

So, when we want to take decisions or we want to communicate project ideas, plans or anything related to the GARID project, we first of all call for a CDC meeting and then have a discussion. If it is a buy-in we want within the CDC, when we discuss it at their level they cannot just immediately tell us that, okay yes, we accept. They will ask for some few days so that they can re-engage with their various community or groups then they’ll come back again to a CDC meeting, take a decision and then communicate that decision with us ... (ACCPCU22, 28/10/2022)

These groups have worked closely with the CLOs and sometimes with RIC to encourage grassroots participation, coordination, RAP mediations and cooperation by affected community residents. In turn the CLOs and RIC report to the project leaders in the PCU, including Social Safeguard and Community Development Specialists. Thus, the path dependent history of community agency in contesting and shaping urban infrastructure in Accra, was a significant contributor to the complex institutional shape of this World Bank funded and central government led development project.

## Conclusion

A range of different actors and their networks, whose scope and reach stretches across putative geographical scales together shape the nature of large-scale UID projects. In this paper we have explored how transcalar processes territorialize investments through cooperation, contestation, and creative production of projects (UID) (Halbert & Rouanet, 2014; Robinson et al., 2022). We used the origins, initiation and decision-making about the GARID project to reflect on the complexity of such transcalar territorializations which often characterize large-scale urban development projects, particularly exploring the agency of central government actors.

We have unravelled this by tracing the actors behind the genesis of GARID, its financing and its concept formation, attending to the transcalar negotiations, the roles of different actors, and their presence through the various phases of the GARID

project. We have demonstrated how actors from transnational agencies and central government ministries, as well as many international consultants and nationally based experts, have come together because of their varied but shared interests in promoting urban resilience and sharing their expertise for “getting the project right” in concept and scope. Halbert and Rouanet’s (2014) concept of transcalar territorial networks (TTN) was useful for framing the interdependences and nuanced relationships amongst different actors who might conventionally be associated with different social, political and economic scales, but whose collective, negotiated relations were crucial to ensure the successful landing of urban development investments and interventions.

Of course, power relations and hegemonic structures and politics determine agendas, preferences and outcomes. The World Bank itself is eager, for example, to export development knowledge, expertise, and regulatory frameworks (Bigger & Webber, 2021; Ravallion, 2016). However, we argue that overemphasizing the power of global development actors to reformat cities and overlooking the diverse role of central government actors in UID risks underestimating the ways in which urban resilience investments have been shaped by actors whose reach and interests often reflect overlapping local, national and international horizons – thus, forging the transcalar networks within which UID is embedded (see also Hönke et al., 2024). In this sense, UID, as argued by Goulding et al. (2023), becomes a networked product, a territorialisation of transcalar networks. In the case discussed here this is brought into being by complex negotiations between donors and central government actors, and through the relations that emerge amongst the many different actors drawn into the network.

The agency of central government actors to advance their interests within the network was demonstrated in their ability to initiate interactions following the disaster, to inform and contribute to the extensive technical work undertaken in preparation, and to ensure that the Bank’s loan and urban resilience agenda is consistent with the Country’s Partnership Framework and Public Financial Policy through the series of technical and review meetings that the government actors attended. Negotiations over financing of compensation for resettlement and overly ambitious land value capture plans exemplify the advancement of the interests of Ghanaian government actors. The competitive interests of the many different ministries and officials evident in the process of the GARID project conception also shaped its institutional design and continue to determine the progress of the project, which has been very slow, with little implementation to date (March 2025).

Focusing in on one key set of relationships entwined in many TTNs to consider how central government and other in-country actors negotiate with transnational actors, we have also emphasized that the actions and agency of government actors cannot be straightforwardly aligned with the idea of “stateness” or “statecraft” (Cirolia & Harber, 2022). Instead, on the terrain of government we identified how corruption (past and potential) determined the focus of negotiations and administration within ringfenced and powerful elements of the MoF; how personal and sectoral competition amongst ministries saw shifting leadership arrangements and a very top heavy organizational form for GARID; how previous confrontational approaches to resettlement and displacement in Accra embedded community agency in the core of the institutional design; and how sporadic and peremptory responses to major disasters, driven by electoral and popularity concerns, stood in place of sustained effective governance of urbanization and flooding challenges. While urban scholars are increasingly concerned to bring the “national state”

back into urban development politics, we argue that this needs to take account of diversity in the nature of “stateness” (Shatkin, 2017) and in central-local government relations (Therborn, 2024), and make space for the multiplicity of actors and interests operating on the terrain of government which are “(not) the state” (Hagmann & Péclard, 2010; Robinson et al., 2024).

Through the example of GARID, we have demonstrated that the range of actors involved in decision-making and implementation in internationally funded urban and infrastructure development for resilience raises questions about the extent to which city governments are or might become outlets for donor investment agendas and/or of “green structural adjustment” (Bigger & Webber, 2021). Instead, we suggest that it is important for urban planners, researchers, and policymakers to pay closer attention to the complexities and nuances of relations amongst different actors in transcalar arrangements shaping UID processes and decision-making. This, we argue, is important in order to better understand the nature and impacts of the increasing number of large-scale interventions for resilient urban development, and to effectively identify the potential to address the vast challenges faced by urban dwellers across the African continent.

## Notes

1. In Ghana, an assembly man or woman is a popular name given to that one person from each local government electoral area within the district elected by universal adult suffrage.
2. Now Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI).
3. The method is not only peculiar to the World Bank. The UN-Habitat, Arup International and the Rockefeller Foundation also use different versions of city resilience diagnostic tools to facilitate their contribution to the ‘global’ urban resilience agenda.
4. Both CCS and GIFMIS are web-based portals. The only difference is that CCC allows WB clients with e-signatories to upload and review financial reports and apply for additional funds from WB whereas GIFMIS is implemented locally in all government Ministries, Departments and Agencies as well as MMDAs to enhance a coordinated budgetary allocation system.

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## Author contribution

All authors contributed to data collection for this paper, in which Rosina Sheburah Essien took the lead. Additionally, the initial conceptualization, material preparation and data analysis were undertaken by Rosina Sheburah Essien. The first versions of the manuscript were written and further edited by Rosina Sheburah Essien. Jennifer Robinson provided overall conceptualization of the wider MAU project, mentoring support for team members’ writing, and contributed additionally to the writing and detailed editing of the paper. George Owusu directed the empirical research and advised, edited, commented and reviewed all versions of the manuscript. Kofi Kekeli

Amedzro edited, commented and reviewed all versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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## Data availability statement


The data supporting this study’s findings are available on request.

## Research ethics and consent

Ethics Approval Ethical: Approval was granted by the University of Ghana’s Ethics Committee for Humanities under project number ECH 093/ 20-21. All informants participated voluntarily after giving informed consent.

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