Foreword

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This book presents the results of the African component of a global project on sustainable cities. In 1993, it successfully competed for support from a limited, special initiatives fund of Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC). At that time, program specialists argued that the project offered “great potential for an extensive and well-coordinated research network to pool scarce funding and conduct high-quality research, by senior specialists in renowned institutions, which would focus on priority urban social, environmental, and economic issues for a more sustainable management of Southern cities.” The reader will no doubt find that this promise has been fulfilled by the research presented in this book. More importantly, we hope that you will concur that Managing the Monster is nothing less than a benchmark contribution to our knowledge on governance and waste management in major urban centres of Africa.

The authors are senior experts from a wide range of entities involved with waste management. They have served as advisers or directors of United Nations agency offices, research-oriented nongovernmental organizations, metropolitan council departments, and university schools and institutes in Africa. Both the proposal and project benefited from discussion between the team and a larger group of experts from around the world, assembled under the Global Urban Research Initiative coordinated by Richard Stren of the University of Toronto.

Ably coordinated by Adepoju G. Onibokun, chief executive of the Centre for African Settlement Studies and Development in Nigeria, this team assigned itself the daunting task of tackling comprehensively a notoriously underreported and mismanaged urban service: waste management. The published literature on the subject was very limited and the researchers had to rely heavily on the gray literature, documents either unpublished or with limited circulation. Adding to their burden, the team undertook to investigate waste management through a governance perspective. At the time, this was a very new approach and, today, remains highly demanding and innovative, for the type of information it requires, the relationships it needs to address, and the recommendations it is expected to deliver.

Managing the Monster highlights new directions on policy and technology that are highly relevant to IDRC’s current focus on urban development research in the South. In a number of urban sectors (water, housing, utilities, open-space management, etc.), better governance is central to improving the effectiveness of service provision. As shown in this book, better governance implies redressing inequitable access to resources and services, confusion and conflict over responsibilities, top-down decision-making, and lack of accountability and transparency. Resource utilization by cities cannot be made more sustainable without increasing waste and by-product recovery; this is needed to reduce urban demands on rural areas and to make cities themselves more viable and liveable. A more equitable, viable, and sustainable use of urban resources can only be enhanced by better governance.

Further, the positive experiences and local capacities discussed in this book point to the real potential for much greater Africa–Africa exchange and cooperation. Greater societal participation, a more decentralized administration, locally appropriate legislation and technologies, and a more integrated approach to managing urban resource flows are all needed to reduce costs and to increase incomes of increasingly poorer city populations and deficit-ridden urban governments.

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