



# THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

## PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES



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Many of our colleagues contributed to making this publication happen. We thank them all. Sandeep Chachra conceptualized the publication and provided guidance. Pritha Chatterjee worked out the framework for the contributions, coordinated with all the contributors and anchored the whole project. Chandan Kumar and Divita Shandilya provided the initial handholding for this project. The Communications Unit ensured timely publication with Joseph Mathai anchoring the process, doing the final edits and the final structuring of the publication, Saroj Patnaik and Tabitha Hutchison proofreading the document, Nabajit Malakar designing the cover and Lalit Dabral supervising the printing.

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## Introduction

# NEW URBAN AGENDA, URBANISM AND THE 21ST CENTURY

***Sandeep Chachra, Pritpal Randhawa and  
Pritha Chatterjee***

It is little over one year and four months since the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development adopted the New Urban Agenda – outlining a vision for the urban world in the twenty first century.

It is still early days since this vision was outlined. While national urban policies and programmes will see evolutions, even as countries prepare to address the challenges and opportunities that urbanization holds out, and peoples’ assertions and campaigns locally, nationally and internationally will bear pressure on shaping these discourses and holding governance to account, we feel it is important to generate greater awareness, participation and debate on the contours of the city we need and the urbanism we all wish to see. This is a discourse represented on social media by hashtag: #TheCityWeNeed.

It is in the generating of a public discourse, which most importantly brings the agency and imagination of the urban majorities and among them foremost the “makers of our cities” – the majorities of “informals” who have even physically constructed the cities of our world; and of course the “makers of the destiny” of the cities – the policy makers, urban governance and the city authorities, that we see a possibility of realizing the vision of sustainable urbanization for the good of all.

*The New Urban Agenda: Prospects and Challenges* has been published with the objective of moving forward conversations on a few ideas, priorities and directions embodied in the New Urban Agenda. While the choices represented by this publication do not reflect the sole importance of the issues chosen over the others,

they do symbolize some of the key tasks that await us all, and where advances would need to be made rather quickly.

The current century is often projected as one of urbanism. Some experts go to the extent of saying that if the twentieth century was that of the struggle for liberation from colonialism and the rise of nation states in the south, embodying the ideas of welfarism and human rights, the twenty first century would be that of cities, defined by struggles of people to claim urban spaces.

This is not hard to imagine, given what the world looks like today, nearing the end of the second decade of the twenty first century. The United Nations says that the dramatic transition is still happening at a hectic pace and in the developing world an estimated three million people arrive in cities every week. By the middle of twenty first century, 70 per cent of global population would be living in cities. With populations, economic activity is also concentrating in urban areas: 70 per cent of global GDP is from cities. Cultural interactions too are increasingly focusing in cities. All these developments have not only meant an increasing distance from the countryside, but have also led to a hollowing out of the countryside amidst increasing agrarian distress. Urbanisation has also posed severe sustainability challenges in terms of housing infrastructure, services, food security, jobs, safety and live-ability. These challenges and pressures have given rise to deep speculations, contests and grave uncertainties about the fate of cities and urbanity.

The influx into urban areas across the globe is resulting in a whopping billion-plus people living in squatter settlements without dignity or without access to even basic services and living amidst insecurity, fear of eviction and harassment. And that number is growing rapidly. How would people living on the streets, in degraded human settlements and castigated to lowest rungs of informality and precariousness in our cities in the south and in the north, act on this situation? And how would governments and city governance respond to this situation? The answers to these questions would perhaps determine the outcomes of how the urban question is resolved in this century.

Concerned about the uncertainty and implications of this dramatic change in human history, Ban Ki-moon, then Secretary-General of the United Nations, had while speaking of the real opportunities urbanization presents, also pointed out the most

pressing challenges of what cities hold out from – pollution, disease, unemployment and lack of adequate shelter.

While Ban Ki-moon called upon city authorities to advance the prosperity of their inhabitants while achieving equitable social outcomes and sustainable use of resources, the New Urban Agenda adopted by the world in October 2016, and the SDG Goal 11 signed up by global leadership, a little more than a year earlier to this, showed cognizance of the existing and emerging challenges that urbanization holds out, and outlined the commitment and need for sustainable urban development as a critical step for realizing sustainable development in an integrated and coordinated manner at the global, regional, national, subnational and local levels, with the participation of all relevant actors.

The New Urban Agenda outlines:

*“We share a vision of cities for all, referring to the equal use and enjoyment of cities and human settlements, seeking to promote inclusivity and ensure that all inhabitants, of present and future generations, without discrimination of any kind, are able to inhabit and produce just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements to foster prosperity and quality of life for all. We note the efforts of some national and local governments to enshrine this vision, referred to as “right to the city”, in their legislation, political declarations and charters.”*

ActionAid has for many years now recognized the importance of working on urban issues from the viewpoint of the common citizens whose voices and interests should take priority in policies governing the city. In India the rights of the urban homeless were one of earliest focus areas we took up in the urban context. We worked with the homeless community and also in the realm of policy. Till a couple of years ago we used to prepare an annual report on the status of homelessness in the country and as a result of our work, done in collaboration with a number of activists and organisations, it is now the settled policy in India that every city has to have a homeless shelter for every one lakh (hundred thousand) population.

More recently we have started work for the rights of people dependent on the informal economy. At the policy level we have advocated for extending them social security benefits to mitigate the vulnerable conditions they face and their precarious access to livelihoods. We have helped set up collectives of informal workers, so their

combined energies can help them gain better access to rights and entitlements. Over the last few years we have been able to set up more than 700 collectives, which together have membership figures upwards of 30,000. We have facilitated access to social security benefits for more than 20,000 informal workers and in order to enhance their livelihood prospects we have delivered skill training to more than 11,000 informal workers, with the majority, more than 7000 being women. On the policy level we have advocated for specific policies to further the rights of domestic workers, street vendors and the right to a fair minimum wage.

Our work over the decades has educated us about the importance of combining grounded interventions aimed at building the protagonism of vulnerable communities, with policy interventions to ensure rights of vulnerable communities are recognised at the highest level.

As mentioned earlier the issues focused on in the contributions that follow should not be seen as a comprehensive coverage of the issues, but as an agenda for some issues that need urgent attention.

The first chapter looks back on the long road taken to ensure the inclusion of “Right to the City” in global urban platforms and in the New Urban Agenda. While celebrating the victory and the installation of the concept and some of the imagination behind it, the idea itself needs far greater embodiment in the processes and aspects of city planning. Collective planning of cities is the need of the hour, and the capacity of all inhabitants must be recognized in bringing about urban transformations. The chapter provides a rich account of the evolution of the “Right to the City” discourse, highlighting the phenomenon of people’s urbanization in many Latin American cities in the 1980s, and how it is still relevant even today. It elaborates on the journey of the concept within the different Habitat Summits and most recently in Habitat III, where the Habitat International Coalition played a pivotal role in incorporating the principle as a non-negotiable in the New Urban Agenda. In this chapter **Lorena Zarate** proposes the need for a paradigm shift to understand human settlements as ‘common goods’ for both present and future generations.

The concept of “Right to the City” is taken forward a step in the second chapter where **P K Das** talks about land equity, inclusive city planning and democratization of the urban spaces. He advocates for reserving land for affordable housing and amenities, and that the phrase ‘housing’ should be rephrased as ‘social housing’ in all

discussions and documents. Das argues that urban land is integral to the provision of housing, and land must remain with the State rather than private players and it should be used for collective public interest. Das suggests that the participating nations in the World Urban Forum need to take a resolution and commit to providing adequate land for social housing to the urbanites especially the most marginalized. Das draws extensively on the experience of Nivara Hakk in Mumbai for promoting self-help housing and argues for the need to unify fragmented city landscapes, through participatory and democratic means to enable the creation of a just and equitable urbanization for now and the future.

**Lena Simet and Melissa De la Cruz** begin their chapter with a sketch of the different perspectives on the linkages between urbanization and economic growth. Despite making significant contribution to a nation's economy, the informal sector continues to be largely neglected across countries, such that informal workers lack a whole range of social protections. However, as the paper argues, this scenario could change if the commitments made as part of the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda, are fulfilled by the signatory countries. Implementation remains a challenge though, and in this context, the chapter brings into discussion the Habitat Commitment Index, a methodology that has been evolved and used to evaluate if and how countries have fulfilled the commitments outlined in Habitat II in 1996, on particular issues of informality and vulnerable employment. Simet and Cruz use a case study of urban transport in Philippines to highlight how technological advancements have produced a shift in patterns of informal labor, which needs to be recognized and included in future debates on urban employment.

**Martha A Chen, Sally Roever and Caroline Skinner** draw on the work of the global research–action–policy network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organising (WIEGO) to review the state of knowledge on urban informal economy in the context of on-going deliberations on how to implement the New Urban Agenda. They present the latest available statistics on the size, composition and contribution of the informal economy in various regions, demonstrating that most non-agricultural jobs in the Global South are informal. They review existing and emerging frameworks for thinking about the informal economy in disciplines of development studies and urban studies, and suggest that development studies should pay more attention to diversity within the informal economy and multiple factors shaping it, and that urban studies should explore the possibilities for inclusive urban planning and practice. Reflecting on the advocacy efforts of organisations of



urban informal workers, they identify three broad categories of promising policy and practice: reducing the negatives, increasing the positives and inviting informal workers to the policy table. This part concludes by arguing that this framework holds promise for realizing the New Urban Agenda commitment to inclusive governance with the informal economy.

**Cathy Holt and Gloria Gallant** present a gendered perspective on the New Urban Agenda in the fifth chapter, arguing that grassroots women are best positioned to lead the implementation of this agenda through participation and leadership in community development. Their analysis is made with reference to the work of the Huairou Commission, a platform that was involved in the consultative processes leading up to the New Urban Agenda, with the objective of promoting an inclusive vision on gender, particularly the voices and concerns of the grassroots women. They present a review of a series of successful initiatives facilitated by the Commission to organize and empower grassroots women for carrying out community-based projects and a build a case for participatory, pro-poor, inclusive and sustainable urban policies and practices, in concurrence with the vision outlined in the New Urban Agenda. They review the challenges faced by these women in implementing this Agenda.

**Javed Abidi** examines the emergent discourse and developments on urbanisation from the perspective of persons with disabilities. Abidi shows the extent of disability in the world, including in urban areas, and how the discourse on disability has evolved over the decades towards a rights perspective. Even though disability is now recognized within international human rights and development frameworks, including the New Urban Agenda, implementation still lags behind and remains a challenge. To illustrate this, the author discusses the case of the Smart Cities Mission in India for sustainable and inclusive development. It was launched in 2015, but ironically, fails to find any convergence with the Accessible India Campaign that was also launched in the same year. To plug this gap, the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) has been making a sustained engagement with multiple stakeholders, including local governments. Abidi discusses their recent interventions, including on the important area of digital inclusion of persons with disabilities within our cities. In conclusion, Abidi reiterates the urgent need to recognize accessibility as a human rights issue and as an integral aspect of inclusive urbanization.

**Birgit Daiber** focuses on the emerging discourse and practice of urban commons in the cities of Europe and the Global South. Daiber draws our attention to how plans of creating Smart Cities across the world need to pay attention to the urban commons approach in all aspects of urban life – including affordable housing, open public spaces, urban agriculture and participative planning. Preservation and protection of commons is one of the most constructive ways to achieve sustainability, and blending together ecological, democratic and social needs of the society. Daiber puts together a rich collection of best practices across the world for promoting and preserving urban commons. Daiber presents examples from different parts of Europe initiated by citizens' groups and by municipalities working on participatory democracy. Notable examples are from the city of Naples, where the City Council changed the municipal statute by inserting 'commons' as one of the fundamental rights. Germany has its self-organized, cohousing projects, ensuring that all inhabitants co-own the real estate assets of such projects. Experiences of Global South are elaborated in the subsequent section, such as favelas of Rio de Janeiro and Social Housing Cooperatives in Egypt. In India, Ahmedabad has its Seva Cafe, to make and serve meals to guests everyday with no price, based on the model of gift economy. Daiber exemplifies the diversity of practices in the urban commons and urges stakeholders to use such learnings in redefining sustainable urban development.

Even as an agenda for urgent action all of us involved with this publication do not see it as a comprehensive list. We see this as another step in on-going dialogues. We look forward to engage with readers and carrying on the conversation with the shared vision of making cities and urbanisation the right for all in an inclusive and ecologically sustainable manner.



## Chapter 1

# THE STRUGGLE FOR RIGHT TO THE CITY AND THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

*Lorena Zárate*

## 1. Introduction

This chapter traces the struggles around the inclusion of the right to the city in global urban platforms, particularly the Habitat Agendas formulated under the aegis of the United Nations (UN). As a discourse, right to the city is not a novelty. For almost half a century it has functioned as a powerful flag of urban struggles as well as been a recurrent topic of multidisciplinary academic debates across the world. It is also recognized in legal instruments and public policies, both locally and nationally, and as such, references to this right are becoming more frequent in international documents. However, despite these advances, the debates on right to the city are yet to become part of the regular baggage of official and diplomatic representatives who meet at the UN to deal with matters of global interest. This was revealed during the negotiations for drafting the New Urban Agenda during the 2016 UN Summit on Human Settlements. Here, as this chapter narrates, the right to the city became one of the most contested topics for discussion and consensus building.

The chapter begins by tracing the early history of the discourse of ‘right to the city’, and is followed by a critical account of the context, course and achievements of the three World Summits on Human Settlements. The most recent summit, Habitat III, is discussed in detail, including the efforts made by urban social movements to advocate ‘right to the city’ in both the preparatory and negotiation processes. The chapter ends by a reflection on the emergent challenges for implementation of inclusive, pro poor, urban agendas.

## 2. 'Right to the City': Genesis and Early History

Like any other species on the planet, human beings need an adequate habitat to live. This statement, although common sense, seems to require a whole set of sophisticated supporting arguments in order to be heard by both the general public and decision makers, including the United Nations (UN). As such, one need not go far from the UN headquarters in cities of New York, Geneva or Nairobi to see the extreme vulnerability of the tens of millions of people living on its streets. And yet it is only a glimpse of the permanent hardships, insecurity and criminalization suffered by almost a third of the global population living in squatter settlements, without access to adequate infrastructure and services, or the daily fears faced by tenants, majority of whom are threatened by evictions, arbitrary and disproportionate increases in rents and poor maintenance of buildings. However, this profound crisis of human habitat, which exists, to a greater or lesser extent, in all regions of the world, and which would perhaps be instantly evident to any potential visitor from another planet, somehow escapes general attention.

To carry forward our discussion on human habitat, it is important to trace the genesis of 'Right to the City', the central discourse around which the rights of urban poor and habitat have been crystallised in the last half-century. It was in the beginning of the 1960s, in New York, that the famous American writer and activist Jane Jacobs made a passionate critique of modernist urbanism and the processes of so-called urban renewal that were killing the life of traditional neighbourhoods of Manhattan. In opposition to the "elaborated learned superstition" of order, control and efficiency, as promulgated by urban planners, architects, politicians, bankers and businessmen, Jacobs articulated with rebelliousness and lucidity, the principles of complexity, chaos, redundancy, diversity and chance that govern our daily interactions in the public space. The multiple actors, scenarios and rhythms of daily life (which she described as a magnificent "ballet") led her to focus her observations and recommendations on the role of streets and parks, mixed uses, multiplicity of buildings, density and pedestrian permeability. In short, hers was a courageous defence of the city on a human scale, which resists the processes of speculation, destruction and gentrification. This vision remains as relevant today as it was then,

Tracing this history further, we should recall that during this decade one also saw the advance of so-called 'peoples' urbanization' in many Latin American cities. This was the result of a massive migration from the countryside to the city, linked to

processes of national industrialization, which began to unfold in several countries, albeit with different rhythms and variants. Herein, the demand for access to land, housing, services and public facilities grew and became central to the making of a movement for urban reform, which, inspired by the postulates and advances of the agrarian reform, gained strength until the end of the decade and resulted in constitutional reforms in countries like Brazil and Colombia in the '80s and early '90s.

The mobilization and commitment of professionals, both women and men, from disciplines such as architecture, urbanism, social work, sociology and law, among others, and the presence of ecclesial institutions, together generated an intellectual churning that was not oblivious to the tensions and concerns of its time. One saw thus the formation of institutions, policies and programs and proposals for legal frameworks that aimed to link the guidelines of urban policy with concerns for social justice, and of a city made by the people.

Within academia, the right to the city was initially formulated by French sociologist, philosopher and geographer, Henri Lefebvre at the end of the 1960s. Lefebvre was a professor at the University of Nanterre (an institution that became the cradle of the May 1968 movement, which as we know is not a coincidence, built as it was near slums and inhabited thereby mostly by immigrants). As conceptualised, this right, collective and complex, implies the need to democratize society and urban management, and to not only simply access what exists but also transform and renew it. Here, the key idea is to recover the social function of property (its use value and not simply its exchange value) and to make effective the right of everyone to participate in decision making processes that affect our life in the city. Since its initial conceptualisation, the academic production on this subject has multiplied exponentially in diverse languages and from diverse disciplines, particularly in the last few decades.

## **Deliberations at the International Level**

Concurrent to these developments, at the global level, concerns about human habitat also came into focus, particularly through the UN conferences, first on Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972) and then on Human Settlements (Vancouver, 1976, and Istanbul, 1996). The pressures and proposals of a multitude of non-governmental actors and what some historians call 'the spirit of an epoch', all created conditions for the formulation of guidelines and commitments that aim to guide the territorial ordering, access and use of land, housing policy, infrastructure, equipment and public

services through a more equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth and urban development, and which promote respect for dignity, guarantee of human rights, and promotion of social justice.

It was within this broad context that on the occasion of the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, urban social movements, civil society networks, trade unions, professional and technical groups, academic institutions and activists converged to formulate a “Treaty for just, democratic and sustainable cities, towns and villages”. Many of these proposals were rearticulated a few years later during the First World Assembly of Villagers (Mexico City, 2000), where more than 350 delegates and social movements representing 35 countries gathered to ‘rethink the city from the people’ (as expressed by one of the slogans). Since then, the process has only gained strength, as seen also in its integration into the dynamics of the World Social Forum, and also the regional and thematic Social Forums.

In 2004 dozens of organizations and networks and thousands of people, who were all part of these ongoing debates, converged for the elaboration, signing and dissemination of the World Charter for the Right to the City (2001-2005). The officials of UN-Habitat and UNESCO also symbolically subscribed to the document. Here, Right to the City was defined as the equitable usufruct of cities within the principles of sustainability, democracy, equity and social justice, and conceived as a political tool for the articulation of struggles throughout the world. According to its preamble, “because of its origin and social meaning, this instrument is primarily aimed at strengthening processes and collective claims against injustice and social and territorial discrimination.”

This document adopted guidelines and principles from those previously approved by regional and national governments, such as the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City (2000) and the Statute of the City in Brazil (2001). In the last decade, it has itself inspired debates and collective texts about the city we want, such as the Charter of the City of Mexico for the Right to the City, approved by all the local government bodies in 2010. It was also an important basis for its recently sanctioned first Constitution (February 2017). Similarly, many of these proposals have been included in instruments signed by national governments, which includes the Constitution of Ecuador, sanctioned in 2008, and the Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City promoted by the United Cities and Local Governments network (2010).

Further, just a decade ago, the Heads of State of Latin America instructed the Ministers of Housing and Urban Planning to promote "the consecration of the Right to the City through the generation of public policies that ensure access to land, adequate housing, infrastructure and social equipment, and the mechanisms and sources of sufficient and sustainable financing" (Declaration of Santiago 2007). While excited about this development, but also worried about diluting the interpretations of this explicit inclusion, several international networks and more than 100 organizations and social movements from 14 Latin American countries elaborated and disseminated a collective declaration that sought, on the one hand, to reinforce the principles and strategic guidelines that constitute the right to the city (not just housing and adequate infrastructure); and, on the other hand, to indicate a set of measures to be promoted at the national level and implemented by various government agencies, in coordination with states, provinces and localities. The central elements of the proposals made to the authorities can be summarized around four fundamental points: strengthening of social production and management of habitat; democratization of land management and access to urban land and buildings; regularization of tenure and access to public services; and harmonization of national and local legislation with international human rights standards and commitments.

In 2010, right to the city was again taken up as the official motto of the 5th World Urban Forum, held in Rio de Janeiro at the end of March. There we participated in a series of dissemination, reflection, debate and training activities. In parallel, the first Urban Social Forum was also convened in a great joint effort thanks to the local coordinating role of the National Forum of Urban Reform of Brazil. From both events emerged statements (Cartas de Rio) that include many proposals made by urban social movements. In recent years, massive citizen movements have emerged from the streets of San Pablo, Johannesburg, Brooklyn and Istanbul on the right to the city. These movements struggle for the defence, expansion and sustainable management of public spaces and common goods, opposition to projects that generate evictions, displacement and dispossession, inclusion of women and girls in neighbourhoods and cities, and democratization of decision-making spaces, among others.

For a long time now, in June each year, spring time in Northern Hemisphere, walks are organised in dozens of cities, in the name of Jacobs. Through these walks, hundreds of people and communities congregate to know first-hand the alternatives being promoted by people living in their neighbourhoods. Right to the City, as articulated by Jacobs, continues to thus inspire social movements, students and professionals in many parts of the world.



### 3. World Summits on Human Settlements

What has been the journey of ‘Right to the City’ within the UN? This section traces a brief history of UN Summit on Human Settlements, or Habitat Summits, as they are called, which take place every 20 years. The first was held in Vancouver (1976), the second in Istanbul (1996), and the most recent in Quito (2016). All of them have come out with statements, action plans and / or agendas that have aimed to guide territorial, habitat and housing policies around the world.

#### Habitat I

Habitat I saw a broad participation of tens of thousands of people from different regions of the world, within the so-called Habitat Forum. This included networks of local governments, as well as of civil society, including indigenous groups, urban movements, activists, professionals and academics, many of whom came from deeply poor and undemocratic contexts. This was also the birthplace of Habitat International Coalition (HIC).

A large part of the reflections and proposals arising from here reached the official Summit and reflected in the Vancouver Declaration and Plan of Action. Here, freedom, dignity and social justice were placed hand in hand with fight against social and racial segregation, harmonious development of rural and urban human settlements, discouragement of excessive consumption and protection of natural resources. Although marked by the tense context of the Cold War, the Declaration did not skimp using language, which would have been explicitly rejected by several sectors linked to the status quo, and which would perhaps sound unusual today. A few revealing examples include: fight against colonialism, aggression, domination and apartheid; rejection of control and foreign occupation; concern for general disarmament and in particular nuclear weapons; and claim of a more just and equitable new economic order.

But as certain chroniclers of the moment perceived very clearly, the key word on that occasion was ‘land’, which as they predicted, “like a rock thrown into a puddle... will generate waves around the world for many years”. Thus, a substantive part of the document was dedicated to the discussion about the different forms of ownership of land, as it had been the subject of hours of “tortuous debate” in the work committees. It is therefore not surprising to read the section dedicated to this central theme. It begins with a clear affirmation that “land, by its unique nature and

the crucial role it plays in human settlements, cannot be treated as an ordinary good, controlled by individuals and subject to market pressures and inefficiencies". It then categorically sanctions that "private property of the land is a principal instrument of accumulation and concentration of wealth and, therefore, contributes to social injustice". For this reason, the pattern of land use should be determined by the long-term interests of the community and "public control (...) is therefore essential for their protection and for achieving the long-term objectives of the policies and strategies of human settlements". The powerful preamble ends by calling on the political will of governments to design and implement "innovative and adequate policies of urban and rural land, as a cornerstone of their efforts to improve the quality of life in human settlements".

Some of the measures that were recommended included gathering detailed knowledge of current patterns of land use and tenure; appropriate legislation that defines the boundaries between individual rights and public interest; adequate instruments to determine the value of land and transfer to the community through taxes, the increases resulting from changes in use, investment and public decisions or due to the general growth of the community among others.

Some of the other significant proposals that came from this summit and were expressed rather differently in the subsequent two summits or even in other UN documents include:

- redistribution of income for equity and social justice;
- establishment of national policies on human settlements and the environment in all countries, as an integral part of any national policy of economic and social development;
- the need to put the true social costs and benefits at the base of the definition and evaluation of policies;
- the reform and creation of new public institutions responsible for the management and financing of human settlements;
- improvement of human settlements conditions by promoting the more equitable distribution of the benefits of development between regions and making them accessible to all people;
- the equitable and fair access to infrastructure and services (relevance and quality, rather than quantity) as a condition for social justice;

- protection of local values;
- participation as an indispensable element of a truly democratic process (not as cheap labor!);
- respect for the needs of mobile groups;
- promotion of the equitable use of the sub-used housing stock;
- support for assisted self-help and construction via the 'informal sector';
- public accountability of the activities of large private corporations;
- promotion of public-private partnerships but with adequate safeguards of public interest.

## **Habitat II**

When the preparation for Habitat II began two decades later, the political context had changed by 180 degree, what with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dominance of the so-called Washington Consensus and the explicit recommendations of the World Bank regarding housing and habitat policies. All this conditioned the initial drafts of the document resulting from Istanbul. Therefore, those involved in the preparatory and negotiation process had to focus on defence of the recognition of the right to housing as a basic human right (which had already been sanctioned as such in several international instruments and previous conferences, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Vancouver Declaration, to name but a few) against the active opposition from the United States delegation and several of its allies.

Finally, the firm position of some countries of the European Union, the Global Forum of Parliamentarians and the group of 77, and the presence of several members of civil society organizations linked to HIC in at least six official delegations, made possible the strong and clear inclusion of the right to housing throughout the approved document.

In general terms, the Habitat Agenda resumed, deepened and complemented several of the commitments already assumed, both in the Plan of Action of Vancouver (1976) and in Agenda 21 of Rio de Janeiro (1992) around seven major areas: a) Adequate housing for all; b) Sustainable human settlements; c) Facilitation and participation; d) Gender equality; e) Financing of housing and human settlements; f) International cooperation; g) Evaluation of progress.

In the Plan of Action, which was also known as the Summits of Cities, the human rights approach coexisted with market based approach (following World Bank recommendations). The almost 200 paragraphs of strategies for implementation present a wide range of actions that cover key issues such as:

- Administration and responsible use of land to guarantee access (although a discourse as strong and detailed as in the Vancouver Declaration is no longer found);
- Adequate housing and security of tenure for all;
- Support for community housing production;
- Attention of vulnerable groups and with special needs;
- Eradication of poverty, creation of productive employment and social integration;
- Eradication of discrimination, in its multiple forms;
- Care for the homeless;
- Eradication and remedy for forced evictions and displacements;
- Habitable, healthy and environmentally sustainable human settlements;
- Integral territorial and urban development (within a broad concept of habitat, respecting the urban-rural continuum as part of an ecosystem of human settlements), centered on people and respectful of gender and generational equity (community development);
- Capture of capital gains for equitable development;
- Preservation of heritage and natural and cultural diversity, as fundamental resources of human settlements and for a full life;
- Promotion of adequate food;
- Improvement of urban economies;
- Sustainable use of energy and prioritization of renewable sources / forms;
- Sustainable communication and transport systems;
- Prevention, mitigation and preparation for disasters and rehabilitation capacity;
- Decentralization and strengthening of local authorities and their associations / networks;

- Popular participation and civic involvement;
- Recognition and support for the fundamental role of governments, local authorities and civil society in the implementation of the housing and habitat agendas;
- Metropolitan planning and management;
- Technology transfer and information exchange;
- Inter-institutional coordination and decentralization;
- Evaluation of results, indicators and good practices.

## **Implementation of the Habitat Agenda**

The implementation of the commitments outlined in the Habitat Agenda has never been properly monitored or evaluated by international organizations. Despite the many recommendations in this regard, the programs, forums and reports of UN-Habitat have not offered an adequate platform for this task. On their part, the national governments have not given priority to this agenda and the local governments that did take substantive steps on the same have done so through the pressure of social actors working on these issues. As such, since 2000, the UN has focused most of its energies on monitoring the Millennium Development Goals, which are rather insignificant as compared to the commitments of Habitat II and the UN human rights instruments.

In any case, in recent decades, it has become clear that in many countries the territorial planning has ceased to be seen as a public responsibility or as a priority in national agenda, and the ‘market rules’ have been allowed to operate practically with total freedom. This has resulted in an exponential increase in prices and of the urban sprawl. At the same time, the commitment of ‘housing for all’ has been translated into the mantra of ‘making our country a country of owners’, neglecting and in many cases attacking housing options for rent and cooperative ownership. Thus, housing has come to be seen as a commodity/finished product rather than as a right/process. Likewise, the ministries of finance continue to enjoy the greatest weight in public policy decisions, with little or no coordination with other sectors, particularly those responsible for social, cultural and environmental policies, including of Habitat. There is also thus a lack of territorial/spatial vision in other sectoral policies and programs.

The most recent global financial and economic crisis in 2008, originated, as we know, mainly by the bursting of the housing bubble generated by the process known

as financialization of housing and the crisis of cheap mortgages. The repercussions of not understanding or not fully complying with the commitments made in Vancouver and Istanbul could not have been more brutal, and the lessons not any clearer. It was in this context that Habitat III was scheduled in 2016.

## **4. Habitat III: Preparatory Process and the New Urban Agenda**

For international networks, and HIC in particular, which have witnessed the advances and setbacks in these debates and processes since many decades, the preparations for Habitat III Summit and the possibility for influencing the New Urban Agenda became a great responsibility. This was an opportunity for mobilizing and (re) establishing articulations with our members, allies and a wide range of actors committed to advancing social justice and human rights at the local level.

### **Interventions by the Habitat International Coalition**

Like before, HIC once again chose to carry out a combined strategy of being both ‘inside and outside’, that is, trying to influence the discussions of the official process, as well as maintaining autonomous spaces in coordination with other platforms to push their own agenda. Thus, our network was present both in the preparations of the official conference as well as in the alternative and self-managed initiatives organised by social, academic and professional organisations before and during the Quito Summit. In the early months of 2014, working groups and international projects were launched, allowing a closer coordination of offices, members and allies of social movements, community organizations, professional and technical associations, academics, students and activists so as they advance common objectives and shared agendas. Members of our Coalition actively participated in the various preparatory events, contributing approaches and experiences in debates and declarations, as well as critically analyzing official documents and supporting the preparation of reports by civil society to point out gaps and contradictions.

The concerns and proposals of HIC mainly revolved around the following issues:

- a) the need to maintain an integral and holistic view of the territory and not only limited to the urban and evaluating the implementation of the commitments assumed as part of the Habitat Agenda;
- b) the mandate to incorporate a priority and transversal approach of respect and

fulfilment of human rights, in accordance with international standards and the progress that has been made in various countries and cities in the last twenty years; and

- c) the demand for broad and substantive participation of non-state actors in the debates and decision-making spaces, giving special relevance to the voices of communities and groups traditionally excluded.

Our Coalition also joined the numerous actors, which echoed these messages. Some of our agendas, such as the need to evaluate the fulfilment of the commitments assumed in the Habitat Agenda approved in Istanbul, including the regulation of the real estate and land markets, the promotion of integrated systems of diverse forms of security of tenure against forced evictions and displacements, the defence of common goods and participatory democracy, etc., were taken up by different voices before and during the parallel activities carried out in Quito (such as the Urban Alternative Meeting and Subjects of Social Transformation, and the Forum Towards an Alternative Habitat III, both carried out at the facilities of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences -FLACSO-, the Social Forum on Resistance to Habitat III, held at the Central University of Ecuador, and the various activities organized at the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador).

## **Global Platform for the Right to the City**

Encouraged by the developments of the last decade, such as the approval of the World Charter for the Right to the City, various networks and organizations became even more committed to the struggles and initiatives for social justice and good living in our territories, and with this intent embarked on the creation of a renewed space for reflection and joint action. Thus was born the Global Platform for the Right to the City (GPR2C). Formally launched at the end of 2014 in Sao Paulo, Brazil, this Platform was proposed as an open and inclusive space for debate, learning and initiatives regarding content, legal recognition and implementation of the right to the city. It sought to guarantee the regular exchange of information, analysis and experiences; training and capacity-building of relevant actors; the elaboration of common positions to influence the processes of defining public policies; and promotion of alliances at the national, regional and international levels.

Among the members and allies of the Platform are various international organizations such as, ActionAid, the International Alliance of Inhabitants (AIH),

the Brazilian Association of Municipalities, Cities Alliance, the Habitat International Coalition (HIC), the Huairou Commission, the Commission for Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), the Global Fund for the Development of Cities (FMDV), the National Forum for Urban Reform (FNUR), the National Front of Mayors and the Brazilian Association of Municipalities (ABM), the Avina Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Habitat for Humanity, the Brazilian Institute of Urban Law, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), Women and Cities (WICI); Polis: Institute of Studies, Training and Advice in Social Policies, the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social and Solidarity Economy (RIPESS), TECHO, the Women and Habitat Network of Latin America, Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI).

During 2015, the GPR2C was very active in the lead up to the Habitat III conference, both inside and outside official spaces. It was involved with the preparatory committees and related negotiations, the regional preparatory events (Prague and Mexico, April 2016), and thematic events, such as the events carried out on Metropolitan Areas (Montreal, October 2015), Intermediate Cities (Cuenca, November 2015), Financing for urban development (Mexico City, March 2016) and Public Spaces (Barcelona, April 2016), as well as in Thinking Fields in Spain, the United States and Mexico. All the declarations which arose from these events, and which were to be official inputs for the New Urban Agenda, included substantive contents related to the right to the city.

Through close coordination with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the network of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the representatives of the Platform also managed to include definitions and relevant proposals in key preparatory materials, such as the so-called 'thematic documents'. At the same time, several of its members were included as experts within the 'political units' that worked on recommendations on critical topics such as the right to the city, gender equity, cultural diversity and social inclusion, urban national land and housing policies, local fiscal systems, informal work and inclusive economy strategies.

In parallel, the Platform promoted its own regional meetings in Africa (Johannesburg, South Africa, November 2015), Asia (Surabaya, Indonesia, December 2015 and July 2016) and Europe (Barcelona, Spain, April 2016) in order to strengthen the mobilization, and broaden the debate and joint proposals towards a shared agenda



for the right to the city. Several events of articulation and training activities were also organized in places like Brazil, Mexico, South Africa and Tunisia, bringing together social movements, civil society organizations, human rights activists, professionals, academics and public officials to exchange concrete challenges as well as tools and experiences to advance the right to the city.

Its members also participated in similar regional and national events for the strengthening of the movement, and for promoting local and national actions linked to the right to the city, such as the II Latin American and Caribbean Forum on Adequate Housing (Monterrey, Mexico, May 2015) and the Fifth World Forum of Human Rights Cities (Gwangju, South Korea, May 2015).

On the occasion of the World Habitat Day 2015, the GPR2C gave a call for the inclusion of the right to the city as the cornerstone of the New Urban Agenda, demanding that the UN and national governments ensure the substantive participation of civil society organizations and local governments as key actors in the definition and implementation of the commitments that would be agreed in Quito in October 2016. During the critical months of the negotiation of New Urban Agenda's final draft, awareness and advocacy efforts were carried out, through direct messaging to delegates, preparation of communications materials, such as videos, and campaigns on social media and offline spaces.

## **The preparatory process**

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the official Habitat III preparatory process started relatively late and, at least initially, was slow in its pace and weak in its strength and contents. The UN General Assembly approved a resolution on the organization of the summit in late 2013, but the venue was only confirmed a year later. The creation of the recommended National Habitat Committees and the preparation of national and regional evaluation and projection reports also took much longer than expected.

By December 2014 the official website of the conference presented a summary table, according to which only 14 national reports had been received while 71 were in progress, and while 48 countries had established the recommended committees, 15 were in progress. In most cases, the presence and role of non-governmental actors was not encouraged much or was limited in scope. One explanation of this could be that the international community, governments and diplomatic representatives, and consequently many of the media, concentrated most of their energies on the

## **The right to the city as a paradigm for action and transformation**

The cities we have in today's world are far from being places of justice. On the contrary, they are the clear expression of the growing inequality and violence suffered by our societies, in which profit and economic calculations are above the well-being, dignity, needs and rights of people and nature.

We urgently need a paradigm shift to understand human settlements and territories as common goods - for present and future generations - that are co-created and must be co-managed. An essential component of this paradigm shift will be to really put people at the center, promoting, respecting and guaranteeing human rights for all, increasing participation in decision-making and in the implementation of public policies, strengthening democracy, transparency and accountability. Activists, communities and grassroots organizations are key players in many of the ongoing positive transformations taking place in human settlements and should be recognized and supported as such. We believe that the right to the city, as a political and programmatic agenda, offers concrete tools to remodel our human settlements as common goods and collective creations.

### **Full exercise of human rights in the city**

All persons (regardless of gender, age, economic or legal status, ethnic, religious or political affiliation, sexual orientation, place of residence in the city, or any other factor) must be able to enjoy and realize all their freedoms and their economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, through the construction of conditions for individual and collective well-being with dignity, equity and social justice.

Actions must be taken that prioritize the attention of individuals and communities living in conditions of vulnerability and with special needs, such as the homeless; people with disabilities, who suffer from mental health problems or chronic diseases; female heads of households with low incomes; refugees, migrants and people living in risk areas.

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negotiations and consensus required for the so-called 2030 Agenda (Sustainable Development Goals) and the Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation, both of which closed during the last quarter of 2015, in New York and Paris respectively. In this context, the mobilization of civil society for Habitat III was not an easy task.

In line with the procedures established by the UN for conferences of this kind, a preparatory committee was established to coordinate the process, whose political bureau was composed of representatives of the governments of Germany, Chad, Chile, Ecuador, Slovakia, France, Indonesia, Czech Republic, Senegal and the United Arab Emirates. This committee met three times officially (Prep Com I in New York, September 2014, Prep Com II in Nairobi, April 2015, and Prep Com III, Surabaya, July 2016). At the same time, a General Secretariat of Habitat was established, with Joan Clos, Director of UN-Habitat at the head, but which was not responsible for the organization of the event. Seen from the outside, the division of tasks and responsibilities between these spaces was not always clear, and therefore hindered the lobbying and advocacy actions intended to be carried out by multiple actors.

Despite its limitations, gradually, the process gained strength, and these multiple actors sought to advance the construction of consensus and commitments for action. The Secretariat of the summit devised a complex strategy that sought to articulate spaces for involvement, analysis and discussion of public policies at different levels. After the World Urban Forum of Medellin, and especially through the World Urban Campaign, the organization of the so-called Urban Thinkers Campus was promoted, as self-managed initiatives convened variously by social and academic networks and institutions, many of which involved the participation of local and national public sectors, and also the private sector. In the 16 month period, a total of 28 CPUs were carried out in different regions, covering a broad spectrum of topics such as gender, youth and children, public space, inclusion, security, health and well-being, planning and legal frameworks, sustainability, mobility, housing and habitat, water and sanitation, art, culture and heritage, knowledge, technology and ethics.

During the first half of 2015, various UN agencies worked for the development of first round of outputs, which included 22 thematic documents (Issue papers) grouped around six issue-based axes: social cohesion and equity; regulatory framework; spatial development; urban economy; ecology and environment; housing and basic services. Between September 2015 and April 2016, four regional forums (Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America) and seven Thematic Forums were convened by national and local

*The right to the city ...*

As main decision-makers, national, provincial and local governments must define legal frameworks, public policies and other administrative and judicial measures to respect, protect and guarantee these rights, under the principles of maximum allocation of available resources and non-retrogression, in accordance with the human rights commitments included in international treaties

### **Social function of land, property and the city**

The distribution of the territory and the rules that govern its enjoyment must guarantee the equitable use of the goods, services and opportunities that the city offers. In other words, we want a city in which the public interest - defined collectively - is prioritized, guaranteeing the socially fair and environmentally balanced use of the territory.

The legal, fiscal and planning regulations must be implemented with the necessary social control, in order to avoid speculation and gentrification processes, both in central and peripheral areas. This includes progressive taxes for vacant or underutilized lots, homes and buildings; compulsive orders for construction, urbanization and land use change; capture of urban capital gains; expropriation for the creation of special zones of social and cultural interest (in particular to protect low-income and disadvantaged families and communities); special use concession for social housing; adverse domain and regularization of self-built neighborhoods (in terms of security of tenure and provision of basic services and infrastructure), among many other instruments that are already implemented in several cities and countries.

The effective and constant application of these measures is, of course, faced with the reaction and resistance of both landowners and speculative real estate sectors, as well as the ignorance and / or extreme caution of public operators and even cultural barriers that are built and they are reinforced through the prevailing discourses in the mass media.

### **Democratic management of the city and the territory**

The inhabitants must be able to participate in decision-making spaces for the formulation and implementation of public policies and budgets, including

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governments, in partnership with UN agencies and other actors, which covered issues of social participation, metropolitan areas, intermediate cities, cities and sustainable energy, financing of urban development, public space and informal settlements. Further, 10 Political Units were constituted with 20 experts from different sectors each, to work in the last months of 2015 and the first of 2016 for the preparation of analysis and input proposals for the New Urban Agenda's draft.

Between the end of April and the end of June 2016, three "informal hearings" were also held under the coordination of the political bureau and the Habitat III secretariat, at the UN headquarters in New York. It saw the participation of diverse actors, including networks and platforms of local authorities, parliamentarians, civil society, women's and youth groups, indigenous peoples, peasants, trade unions, professionals, academics, journalists, foundations and the private sector. This was a part of the accelerated negotiation process, whose main goal was to share a synthesis of the multiple inputs coming from the thematic and regional events, the analysis documents and proposals prepared by the political units as well as to work on the successive drafts of the so-called New Urban Agenda.

## **The challenges of negotiation**

The possibility of participating in such a negotiation process brought some learnings, with few surprises and several frustrations. Before we discuss it, it is important to note that negotiations form a regular part of their work for civil servants, who work with either national governments or UN agencies. However, unlike them, civil society actors and even local governments have to dedicate enormous time and resources, which is not always possible for them to achieve. Some of the challenges they face include having timely access to the right information, adequate time for reviewing and commenting on a large number of materials (usually available only in English), getting support to travel and attend multiple meetings and events, and being heard by other stakeholders.

Further, at the negotiation table, many subtle dynamics come into play, which may not be evident to all. The representatives come to the plenary with drafts, or proposals for adjustments in existing drafts, which could include both general comments and specific corrections. Often, the discussion resolves less around substantive issues, and more on the suggested modifications. If there is dissent, the discussions are continued behind closed doors, and thus accessible only to the official delegates.

*The right to the city ...*

territorial planning and the control of urban processes. We refer to the strengthening of institutionalized spaces for decision-making (and not only for citizen consultation), from which it is possible to monitor, audit, evaluate and reorient public policies.

This includes participatory budgeting experiences, neighbourhood impact assessment (especially the social and economic effects of public and private projects and mega-projects, including the participation of affected communities at each step of the process) and participatory planning (including master plans, territorial and urban development, urban mobility plans, etc.). Other diverse tools are being used in many cities, from free and democratic elections, citizen audits, popular initiatives of law and planning (including regulations for concession, suspension and revocation of urban licenses), revocation of mandate and referendums, neighbourhood and community commissions, public hearings, dialogue tables and deliberative councils.

However, many countries still have centralized and in many cases undemocratic national governments, which appoint local authorities and inhibit the possibility of participatory decision-making processes. Or vice versa, there are important decentralization processes that de-concentrate functions and responsibilities but not public resources or technical and operational capacity. On the other hand, the participation spaces that are created are generally subject to the will and political times of the governments in turn and are therefore fragile and intermittent.

### **Democratic production of the city and in the city**

The productive capacity of the inhabitants must be recognized and strengthened, in particular that of the marginalized and low-income sectors, fostering and supporting the social production of the habitat and the development of activities of the social and solidarity economy. In other words, the right to produce the city, but also a habitat that is productive for all, in the sense of generating income for families and communities, strengthening the popular economy and the social and solidarity economy, and not the profits increasingly monopolistic of a few companies (generally transnational).

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In many ways, the negotiations are diplomatic in the full sense of the word, because a whole catalogue of previous arrangements and disarrangements take place in parallel constellations, which are often very difficult to follow for casual observers with restricted access. And this is why there is clear tendency to incorporate content from texts already approved and very little space to introduce new ideas. It is worth asking then, what spaces are there for the incorporation of our paradigms in an institution such as the UN.

The lack of institutional memory is another serious challenge. Whether it is the UN agencies, national public spaces or academic and professional sectors, common to all is a lack of intergenerational dialogue or opportunities to reflect on the commitments made, lessons learned and challenges in place. In this context, it needs to be asked: what other opportunity will there be to make a critical assessment of housing and habitat policies and at the same time recognize the transformative experiences promoted by social movements and local authorities? What relevance can a document have that does not reflect the advances, setbacks and challenges of the last two decades? What lessons are transmitted and how does one speak to the new generations? And what clues does it give us to understand the future?

What is also seen is that issues of housing and urban development are not a regular part of the working agenda of a huge section of the diplomatic corps. It is therefore not surprising to find that during the debates and negotiations, delegates are unaware of the language and discourses linked to the cities, as they propose to remove concepts, phrases or even entire paragraphs from drafts. As an instance, this time, many of the everyday expressions shared by local authorities, social activists, professionals and academics such as the principle of subsidiarity, social and solidarity economy, green-blue-gray infrastructure were not familiar to these delegates. In such a context, one needs to ask as to why our discourses, experiences and learnings do not manage to permeate public and diplomatic officials. How can we explain this profound disconnection between those who face and try to solve the problems and challenges of daily life in our cities and territories and those who are in charge of negotiating international agendas and commitments in this area?

### **The struggle for the inclusion of ‘right to the city’**

Given this backdrop, the inclusion of an explicit ‘right to the city’ within the New Urban Agenda (NUA) became one of the most critical areas of debate, requiring extraordinary negotiation sessions for the final formulation at Quito.

*The right to the city ...*

It is known that in the south of the world, at least half of the living space is the result of the initiatives and efforts of its own inhabitants, with little or no support from governments and other actors. In many cases, these initiatives must even face official barriers and bureaucratic work since, instead of supporting these popular processes, many current regulations ignore or even criminalize individual and collective efforts to obtain a decent place to live.

At present, few countries have established a system of legal, financial and administrative mechanisms to support what we call "the social production of habitat" (including access urban land, adequate loans, subsidies and technical assistance); but even there, the percentage of the budget that goes to the private sector - for the construction of "social housing" that is inaccessible economically for more than half of the population - remains above 90%.

**Responsible and sustainable management of the common assets (natural, energy, heritage, cultural, historical) of the city and its surroundings**

Both inhabitants and authorities must guarantee a responsible relationship with nature, in such a way that makes possible a dignified life for all people, families and communities, in equal conditions, but without affecting the natural areas and ecological reserves, the cultural heritage and historical, other cities or future generations.

As we know, human life and life in urban settlements is only possible if we preserve all forms of life, everywhere. Urban life takes most of the resources it needs beyond the administrative limits of cities. There is an urgent need to implement stricter environmental regulations; promote the protection of aquifers and the collection of rainwater; encourage the use of technologies at an affordable cost; prioritize multimodal mass and public transport systems; guarantee the ecological production of food, the distribution of proximity and responsible consumption; among many other measures to guarantee the sustainability that should be taken in the short, medium and long term.

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It should be noted that from the beginning of the official process, right to the city was present as one of the subjects of the 22 thematic documents, and as one of the 10 political units in the first draft of the NUA circulated in January 2016. It was later mentioned in the statements of several preparatory events and in all the drafts of the NUA. However, what seemed like a consensus in fact became one of the 'hot potatoes' during the months of intense negotiation.

Certainly, the right to the city is a non-conventional and complex right, because in definition it articulates not only other existing individual and collective rights, but also those that are emergent, i.e. those not codified in international instruments and standards. This is why it generated much discussion and opposition. Curiously, the initial documents did not mention human rights and we had to remind the official delegates that alongside peace and development, human rights form one of the three pillars of the UN Charter of Principles, and therefore all their work must be fundamentally oriented around it. In the initial debates, several governments argued that the right to the city was not a human rights issue but an urban agenda. They were unaware that this right is at the base of all current problems: the city as a common good and the right of the people versus the city as business and a city hostage to electoral swings.

The negotiation process certainly revealed these disconnections, and also highlighted the different views that cultures have of a 'right'. While in some cases 'legalistic' or 'normative' interpretations predominate, in others it is more about values and social and legal principles that frame political claims and public actions.

It is certainly no coincidence that many of the countries that opposed the incorporation of the right to housing twenty years ago now also opposed the introduction of the right to the city. During the negotiation process, several actors insisted on equating (and replacing) it with the expression 'cities for all'. This slogan has been widely used by activists such as in titles of publications, or by local governments in mottos and or even by commercial advertisers in their campaigns, but it still lacks the conceptual, normative or programmatic corpus as embodied in the right to the city.

Thanks to the coordinated mobilization and tireless lobbying of international networks of civil society and local governments, the right to the city was introduced as part of the "shared vision" in the Declaration of Quito, which represented the initial

*The right to the city ...*

## **Democratic and equitable enjoyment of the city**

Social coexistence, as well as social organization and the critical expression of ideas and political positions, is possible and reinforced through the recovery, expansion and improvement of public spaces to allow meeting, recreation, creativity. In recent years, especially as a local and spatial consequence of neoliberal policies, a large part of those spaces that are fundamental for the definition of urban and community life have been neglected, abandoned, underused or, even worse, privatized: streets, squares, parks, auditoriums, multipurpose rooms, community centres, etc.

Advancing towards the implementation of the paradigm of cities and territories as rights, and not as merchandise, will require fundamental changes in the conceptions, knowledge, attitudes and practices of a wide range of actors and institutions at multiple levels.

Thus understood, there is no doubt that the right to the city provides elements that make the integrality and interdependence of human rights more tangible. Viewed from a specific territory, and from the needs and aspirations of populations that suffer from marginalization and spatial, economic, social, political and cultural segregation on a daily basis, this new collective and complex right poses challenges that overcome compartmentalized academic knowledge, specialties professionals and sectorial and short-term governmental action (governed above all by electoral and partisan logics).

At the same time, it highlights the urgent need for democratization of decision-making spaces for the collective management of the common good, as a fundamental condition for the possibility of respect and fulfilment of all human rights for all.

Political will, democratic behaviour and the abilities of public officials at the national and local levels will be essential. It will also be necessary to make progress in the substantive transformation of the training curricula and the professional practice of the many fields related to human settlements: architecture, engineering, urban planning, law... but also economics, politics

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set of political agreements within the New Urban Agenda. Some of the advocacy strategies used during those very intense months included preparation of collective documents, multiple bilateral meetings and social media campaigns.

As usually happens in these processes, the most solid formulation was included in the so-called 'zero draft'. The text circulated in May said:

"We commit ourselves to the realization of the concept of cities for all, which in some countries is defined as the Right to the City and compiles the shared systematization of existing rights, ensuring that all inhabitants, of present and future generations, are capable of to inhabit, use and produce fair, inclusive and sustainable cities, which exist as an essential common good for a high quality of life".

However, this section was quickly indicated as "controversial", by the governments of the United States, Russia, India and Japan, among others. Subsequently, Canada and European Union also became hesitant to favour it. On their part, three countries, including Ecuador (host country and the only one in the world that has incorporated the right to the city in its national Constitution), Brazil (one of the pioneers in developing legal instruments in this regard, as mentioned previously) and Mexico (an important player in the two previous summits, and where right to the city has been part of the political agenda for many years) actively pushed for this right and managed to gain allies in the governments of Chile, El Salvador, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Given the contested nature of debates in the plenary sessions, the right to the city became one of the topics of many deliberations and negotiations behind closed doors. The extraordinary session called after the failure of the PrepCom III in Surabaya in this regard was already in progress, when an ad hoc committee in charge of the Netherlands and Uruguay managed to produce the compromise formula that was incorporated in the final draft taken to Quito.

"We share the ideal of a city for all, in terms of equality in the use and enjoyment of cities and human settlements, seeking to promote integration and ensure that all inhabitants, both present and future generations, without discrimination of any kind, can create cities and human settlements that are just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient and sustainable, and live in them, in order to promote prosperity and quality of life for all. We note the efforts of some national and local governments

*The right to the city ...*

and diplomacy in general. For their part, business schools will need to incorporate approaches to human rights, territory and sustainability if we really want to put people and nature at the center of our concerns and actions.

The UN system will certainly require addressing the current patterns and challenges of urbanization more regularly, making the right to the city a key issue on the international agenda and not simply something that is discussed sporadically, hopefully, every twenty years. ■

to consecrate this ideal, known as ‘the right to the city’ in its laws, political statements and charters”.

Despite the strong resistance, the term managed to survive, but of course it did not come out unscathed. As many analysts have observed, stronger expressions such as "we commit to" were replaced in a few weeks by weaker ones such as "we rely on" or "share." At the same time, the explicit reference to the right to the city went from the first to the last part of that paragraph. Notwithstanding, its definition, as well as many of its main contents and public policy recommendations were included in the final text adopted by 167 national governments at the Habitat III Conference and then ratified by the UN General Assembly in New York (December 2016). This was thus the first time an explicit reference to the right to the city had been introduced within a declaration and an action plan signed in this regard.

One should commend however the expression and clear inclusion of several other significant principles which social actors had been working on for decades. These include:

- respect for all human rights and gender equity for all;
- the social function of the land, the public control of gentrification and speculation processes, and the capture and distribution of increases in the value of land generated by urban development;
- the promotion and support of a wide range of housing options and guarantees for security of tenure and the right to housing, including the social production of housing, rental housing, cooperatives and other collective and traditional forms of tenure;

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- the recognition of the contributions of the 'informal' sector and of the social and solidarity economy to the urban economy as a whole;
- the commitment to a sustainable and responsible management of natural, cultural and patrimonial common goods;
- the integrated vision of planning and territorial management, understanding metropolitan and regional interactions and responsibilities in terms of ecosystems and urban-rural links, beyond administrative boundaries.

There are certainly many key issues that were left aside, including those that were part of the previous versions of the draft agenda, which were supported by local governments and civil society organizations, and in some cases even by national diplomats. All of them related to our vision of the right to the city, human settlements and the territory as common goods; the need to strengthen democracy and democratic institutions; respect for sexual and gender diversity, as well as the rights of LGBT people and groups (notwithstanding the substantive advances made on this matter in a large number of countries). As an instance, the social and solidarity economy is mentioned only once throughout the text and its relevant contributions to society not explicitly recognized. Also, local governments no longer appear as "the closest partners," as the Habitat Agenda recognized in 1996, and in fact many of their most important proposals such as having guaranteed access to twenty percent of national funds were rejected.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect is the complete lack of critical approach in relation to the mantra of "sustained economic growth" or the contradictions of the current patterns of production, distribution and consumption, and how that bears on our agendas of urban equity and sustainability.

The diagnostic sections that had been included in some of the initial materials of the process, such as thematic documents were eliminated from the drafts of the NUA, in the name of getting a 'synthetic and action-oriented' final text. Thus, the agenda seems to ignore the most pressing contemporary challenges for the human habitat and, therefore, does not offer concrete measures to address them or to prevent the multiple crises from worsening in the near future.

## 5. Challenges for implementation and follow-up

In its last section, titled "follow-up and review", the New Urban Agenda offers some clues for national and local governments, civil society and the international community to advance the definition of strategies and tools for monitoring and evaluating this 'high level' political document. From now on (and until Habitat IV, to be held potentially in 2036), the Secretary General will have to present, every four years, reports of the progress on the implementation of the commitments and recommendations of the NUA, based on such reports presented by national governments and other non-state actors.

However, a good part of the key definitions are still in the air and yet to be defined, considering that the future of the UN-Habitat agency and its role in this process (another of the 'hot potatoes' during the negotiations prior to Quito) will be subject to independent evaluations, discussions and agreements within the sessions of the General Assembly scheduled for the second half of 2017.

In the adopted document, UN-Habitat appears only as a "focal point on sustainable urbanization and human settlements", which is generally responsible for monitoring the NUA but in collaboration with other agencies of the United Nations system. The more specific roles and functions remain undefined (partly because of the lack of consensus) and their discussion will most likely to be affected by the broader process of defining the institutional arrangements and follow-up mechanisms to the other two recently approved global agendas (2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreements on climate change).

Beyond the international swings, it is clear that the actions required in the context of the current urban crises related to land and housing cannot wait. Therefore the impact of this conference and the NUA should necessarily be measured by the implementation of concrete policies to address inequality and spatial segregation and move towards greater social and territorial justice, at the local, national and international levels. This will require not only greater inter-institutional coordination, as the New Urban Agenda also recommends, but also a long-term vision and coherence between economic, political, social, cultural and environmental measures that today are not aligned in terms of their objectives and instruments, and that therefore often have contradictory and counterproductive results.

On their part, local governments, which were till recently treated by national governments at par with civil society and other non-state actors, are now aware of the enormous responsibilities that falls on them for the implementation of this agenda. In this regard, they are already making progress in 'localization' and 'harmonization' of the commitments included in it, which highlight the relevance of the co-creation of human settlements. Social, professional and academic organizations are also reviewing ongoing initiatives, as well as proposing new ones, such as the deepening of autonomous and self-managed community alternatives, as well as providing recommendations and evaluations on public policy.

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## Chapter 2

# A RUN FOR SOCIAL HOUSING: LAND EQUITY, INCLUSIVE PLANNING AND URBANIZATION OF CITIES

*P. K. Das*

### 1. Introduction

This chapter brings to focus the question of 'right to housing', through a discussion on the ongoing struggles by poor and marginalised sections, particularly those that have been waged in Mumbai, in which the author and his organization Nivara Hakk, have actively participated. Framed within the approach of 'Right to the City', the following issues are covered at length.

1. Land Equity: Ensuring reservation of land exclusively for affordable housing for the poor, lower middle class and other marginalized people.
2. Inclusive City Planning: Accepting existing land occupation patterns, including the informal settlements, in the preparation of city development plans.
3. Housing and Urbanisation of Cities: Considering housing development for all, beyond the free-market, as a means for achievement of urbanization and democratization of cities.

Most cities of the world share some common features such as land misutilisation, exclusionary planning, and oppressive housing conditions, in which large numbers of people are forced to live. In the neo-liberalized world, market is the mantra and many nations pledge total allegiance to it, expecting it to deliver on almost all social development needs, including housing, health-care and education. This is why, since liberalisation, governments have been shirking their own responsibility and instead facilitating the private sector to undertake these responsibilities.

But it is precisely this logic that has contributed to a lack of affordable housing and to proliferation of slums and urban informal settlements in cities. The discussion on social housing is necessarily linked to, and begins with, the question of land - its availability, access, and affordability. In most cities, land is denied for the construction of affordable housing and social amenities for the poor and lower middle class people. The high cost of land is also a deterrent. In the absence of formally developed affordable housing, these sections have no alternative but to live in slums. In fact, slums are the only places where people are able to find affordable housing. In other words, it is not shortage of land but its manipulation and misutilization that has made affordable social housing unviable.

In cities of the Global South, vast sections of population live in slums and informal settlements, in highly oppressive and unacceptable conditions. It is therefore required to rebuild these slums through participatory and democratic means for the achievement of dignified living standards. In many cities, the poor sections have occupied land not only to have a roof over their head, but also to carry out economic activities. This occupation should be seen as an example of people claiming their right to land. It is in this context that movements against forced evictions and displacement should be seen as a significant political action for the achievement of the 'Right to the City' objective.

Planned redevelopment of slums cannot however be pursued outside of the larger city planning objectives, as the integration of slums and informal economic activity within the neighborhoods and the city is a necessary condition for sustainable urban development. Their inclusion and integration ought to be thus accepted as mandatory in defining land-use and planning of cities. Rather, these conditions should constitute the key principles of city planning and development programmes for now and the future. Also, the current laws, which fail to deal with the needs and aspirations of the majority of marginalized sections should be amended, or new laws be introduced to this end.

As such, given the adverse land-person ratio in most cities, democratization of cities not only requires equity in land use, but also demands the consideration and achievement of collective ownership and sharing. And at a time when colonization of land and resources and various forms of social divide threaten our democratic fabric, the reconstruction of slums and informal settlements and their integration with the city would be an effective means for harnessing the much necessary collective solidarities.

Integral to the housing question is also the question of access to social amenities and infrastructure, including education and health care, open spaces, safe drinking water, sewage, sanitation and waste management, along with a healthy environment which impacts the quality of life in many direct and indirect ways. An understanding and assessment of the various issues relating to housing must therefore be based on the needs, aspirations and demands of these struggling people and their relationship with the city.

Cities have grown in spite of the fact that successive governments have failed to deal with the diverse social needs and demands. As a matter of fact, it is only due to the pressure by organizations and movements of the marginalized that the authorities have been forced to tolerate slums in many cities, and also extend limited and conditional support. The way forward in resolving this crisis, as has been discussed in detail below, is necessarily the inclusion and upliftment of these settlements, rather than demolition and displacement.

## **2. Land Equity**

Since liberalization, our cities are under siege by those who have colonized public assets, such as land, for personal and private profit. This scenario needs to be reversed and land must be reclaimed for public projects, including for social housing and infrastructure. In this regard, our development plan of cities must incorporate reservation and regularization of land occupied by slums and other informal settlements, and also the redevelopment of existing settlements.

### **Land for Affordable Housing**

One of the central questions within this discussion is how do we achieve equity in land use and interweave the disparate fragments of our fast growing cities into unified landscape?

In this regard, one needs to bring into view the commitments of the New Urban Agenda. It would have been a far-reaching achievement of the Habitat III Conference if all participating nations unequivocally agreed to commit land in their cities exclusively for construction of affordable housing. In doing so, the governments would have had to undertake direct responsibility of building affordable housing and not rely on markets for this supply. Unfortunately this did not come through Agenda. However, one of the positive outcomes of the conference was that the governments

agreed to collectively review, intermittently assess, and agree on individual cities' and nations' action plans for successful implementation of the global objectives (P.K. Das in Nature of Cities Blog)

Apart from fulfilling the commitments of the New Urban Agenda, there is a need to outline more urgent and specific interventions for equitable distribution of land and an increased role of governments in building affordable housing and amenities for all. The challenge here will be to incorporate and reflect the multitude of local needs and demands into a set of common principles and make suitable action plans for the achievement of these objectives.

## **Equity in land use**

As part of the liberalisation package, most countries have pushed the question of land to the back stage. It is no longer addressed directly but dodged through plans for various development projects.

Lefebvre asserts that 'physical land is not just a means of production but a part of the forces of production'. David Harvey too has observed that 'physical space helps the dominant class to produce itself and maintain its hegemony over the other classes. Urban space, to a large extent, gets structured by the capitalist accumulation process and therefore reflects both its coherence and its contradictions' (R.N. Sharma in Shaw 2007).

These observations stand testified within the Indian context. Take for instance the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act (ULCRA), a progressive law that was introduced by the Government of India in 1976, which imposed a ceiling on vacant land in large cities and empowered the state to acquire land in excess of the ceiling. It was repealed after liberalization of India's economy in 1990, and much due to the pressure of builders and developers along with others from the ruling class.

Over the years, substantial public land has been gifted away by governments or captured by private developers. All this has seriously harmed public interest. In many instances, governments have negotiated deals with private landowners and developers for a small portion of the built-up area in their high-cost projects on affordable housing. For Instance, Mumbai is in a critical state as a result of high land price and speculative investment. Land value is being determined by private landowners under the market mechanism, making public projects unviable for implementation. There is

thus a huge shortfall to the tune of one million houses in affordable housing and also social provisions such as health and education, among others.

In order to realize equity in land use, land must remain with the state and should be considered as a vital public asset and not be colonized by influential private interests or lobbies. Also, determination of land value, land-use and development must squarely rest upon public interest.

## **Social Housing**

The New Urban Agenda mentions the need for governments to allocate land for housing. This is too general, and rather weak as a proposition given the current situation of ownership of land. We know that land earmarked for housing has been taken over and exploited almost entirely for exclusive upper class housing, high-cost amenities and commercial development. Therefore, land has to be more specifically reserved for affordable housing and amenities. It is time that 'Housing' should be re-addressed or rephrased as 'Social Housing' in all discussions and documents. Given the gravity of housing condition in most cities, the collective focus should shift to social housing alone.

Hopefully, the New Urban Agenda follow-up conferences resolve that governments of all participating nations agree to commit adequate land for social housing and take upon themselves the responsibility for developing such housing, along with amenities.

## **Speculative Urban Land**

In Indian cities, governments have devised ways by which the land occupied under slums is open to grab by private developers for furthering their business interests. The governments hide this bluff on claims of providing 'free houses' to the slum dwellers. However, experience of redeveloped slums shows how this promise is far from truth. Rather these schemes have imposed enormous financial burden on the people due to high repair, maintenance and management costs, which often compels them to sell or rent their houses and move to affordable alternatives. In short, the slum redevelopment schemes have resulted in the displacement, or threat of displacement, of the poor.

Experiences from some South American cities are different, but there too the poor are largely excluded from the various mainstream development works while

being forced to continue with their lives in slum like conditions. The settlements built on land and hills in the distant peripheries of cities such as Lima, Bogota and Sao Paulo, tell us such a story. Even though the occupied land and settlements of the poor have been regularized in many cities, there is however no plan for their integration and for provision of adequate and accessible amenities. For instance, health care facilities are severely lacking in these areas and people have to travel far to find a reliable doctor, and consequently are often compelled to seek relief from expensive, but ill equipped doctors or quacks in the local areas. Through these multiple forms of exclusion, governments have pushed poor people to miseries of ghettos, where, social tension, insecurity and violence are prevalent. Most people living in ghettos on the outskirts have to travel long distances to reach their work in the city centre.

The lesson here is that merely recognizing and regularizing these settlements, without improving their living conditions or integrating them within the city, is not enough.

## **Mapping existing land-use**

There is substantive evidence of how data is manufactured by governments to suit the interests of private investors and real estate agencies. As a matter of fact, most information given out in the public domain, is produced by few agencies, which are either directly set up by them or which support the principles of neo-liberalization. Such data invariably contradicts public interest. Given this context, a community led collective mapping process is necessary in order to challenge the information and data provided by governments and these private agencies.

Take the case of Mumbai, where it is common knowledge that builders and developers, in connivance with corrupt officials, tamper with land records, to seek land with a development potential. It has also been seen that the illegally reclaimed mangrove and wetland areas are being used for construction of various infrastructure and amenity projects or saltpan areas being pushed by governments for construction of affordable housing. In order to check such anti-people and environmentally dangerous acts, and to influence decisions that benefit the needs and aspirations of the majority of people, mapping of land becomes a necessary urban development strategy.

Community mapping is also about building an effective public vigilance mechanism over public assets and development decisions, besides positively

contributing to developing alternatives. The process of mapping is an effective means for mobilizing participation too. Promoting open data and organizing public dialogue are key tenets of democracy. Mapping is a significant political act as it opens new doors to socio-political understanding and valuation of the various resources—natural and man-made—while exposing and challenging the deep nexus between the various adverse forces. It also provides an opportunity for the general public to understand the history of land ownership, its value, its colonization, and also its unavailability. This can potentially also empower them to advocate for its just utilization.

In 2011, Nivara Hakk and P.K. Das & Associates took on the exercise of mapping the slum lands of Mumbai using Google Earth images and data from the MCGM, SRA and various other Mumbai maps. This ‘Mumbai’s Slums Map’ was created with an objective of preparing a comprehensive Slum Redevelopment Master Plan and thereby help guide provisions for affordable housing, such as the reservation of all slum occupied land for this purpose.

## **Land, Ecology & Environment**

Mapping also helps in understanding the state of ecology and environment. This is indeed a critical concern as climate change is challenging the way we have built cities and put land and natural areas to threat. For instance, in Mumbai, reclamation of creeks, ponds, lakes, wetlands and mangroves for construction has put the city to a high risk of floods and other natural calamities. None other than the Mumbai Metropolitan Development Authority (MMRDA), a state government agency for planning Mumbai’s development, has reclaimed over 600 acres of Mithi River and flood plains in order to promote business and real estate interests. According to research studies done by institutes such as the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), this has been a major cause of recurring floods in the neighborhoods around the river.

Writing on environmental challenges and quality of life, McGrath (2013) notes:

*...this devastation is often seen as a symptom of the conflict between ‘environment’ and ‘development’. But this interpretation is thoroughly misleading. If development is about enhancing human freedoms and the quality of life – an important understanding for which we have argued – then the quality of the environment is bound to be part of what we want to preserve and promote. In fact, this broader view of development can help*



*not only to integrate development and environmental concerns but also to achieve a better understanding of our environmental challenges, in terms of the quality and freedom of human lives...*

Mapping not only helps record such ecological excesses and damages, but also helps us think of ways to restore and conserve the natural areas, and integrate them within city development plans. It is paramount therefore that governments commit towards the preparation of development plans based on ecological and environmental priority, even if this requires demolishing and doing away with certain existing constructions.

As such, the mindset of judging land by solely its construction potential needs to change. Adequate land has to be maintained for open spaces, city forests etc. in order to achieve sustainable growth, while responding to adverse climate change impact. Such land, free of construction should not only be in the periphery but also in proximity to built-up areas. In fact, the value of land for construction ought to be considered on the basis of its closeness and relationship with open spaces. Open spaces include the various natural areas too. Interestingly, it is possible to achieve this integration even in densely built areas. There are many examples of such interventions and urban insertions in cities across the world where without major demolition of existing buildings and displacing economic activities.

## **Divided land and territories**

Land is usually colour coded as green, blue and brown. Green and blue represents coverage with trees and water, brown indicates barren land. In India, such barren land is considered to be wasteland and managed by the Wasteland Board, a government authority. But today, we witness a new colour of land in our cities, which is grey, signifying land laden with concrete. The extent and density of the grey depends on the volume of concrete consumed, and it is this code used by governments as a basis of judging the scale of development achieved. But, sadly, these physical divisions are not the only ones we see in our urban scenarios. As cities are expanding, we find them increasingly divided on lines of caste, race, religion, class, gender and sexuality. A conspicuous separation now exists between gated communities of the privileged and ghettoized territories of marginalized people.

Reflecting on this fragmentation nature of our contemporary cities, Shaw (2012) writes:

*In the gated communities, there is a lack of tolerance for plurality and its accompanying untidiness that marks the rest of the Indian city. They represent a new and exclusive environment that has been purposely created to be orderly, clean and with sharp boundaries. They reflect the increasingly disengaged nature of the rich and upper classes in urban India who want to be left alone to enjoy their lives and not be disturbed by the heterogeneous clamor of the city. The formal private sector are increasingly high-rise to support the high cost of land, allow for open green spaces, and guarantee a sky-view of the city and the feeling of being far away and above the din and dirt.*

We need to design cities which unite rather than divide, which foster community, cooperation and collaboration, and this intention has to permeate all our thinking and actions on urban development.

## **Land Value**

Within the market economy, value and use of land is decided on the basis of its 'development potential'. In order to boost this potential, governments are regularly revisiting and revising various development control regulations, particularly increasing the permissible Floor Area Ratio (FAR). Real estate builders and developers also influence such revisions. Even when high FAR has been detrimental to urban development interest, governments have raised the FAR for select areas and projects. Value of land is regularly manipulated for its control by private agencies.

Given this context, the question is, how can we ensure affordable and low cost housing and amenity projects? To this one can say, this is possible if governments implement a varying land price policy, where in land designated for various social development works has a considerably low price compared to land available for exclusive and high-cost projects. Such land policies are in place in countries like Columbia and Netherlands, which should be discussed and adapted by all cities.

National and city governments all over the world would have to consider measures that discourage the evaluation of land price by free market forces and fix prices for social projects with an objective of making these affordable to the poor. In fact, nations must formulate and adopt policies that would enable abolition of private ownership of land.

### 3. Inclusive Planning

The second most important aspect of ensuring housing for all is the acceptance of existing land occupation patterns, that of slums and other informal settlements, within development plans. This should in fact be a key principle of city planning.

#### Planning

Planning, as we know is a tool for the achievement of development objectives. But when development objectives are skewed in favour of a few who control land and resources, public interest is severely compromised. This trend in decision-making is reflected in the planning of cities too, particularly in decisions relating to land-use and development. It is therefore not surprising that production and availability of social housing is not a priority and in many Indian cities. Urban planning and design is neglected, and instead, those policies and regulations that facilitate 'development' are promoted. The impact of these processes on the built form and environment of the city is therefore quite devastating. Shivramakrishnan (2014) states:

*City master plans generally follow an exclusionary model that reserve land for housing of high and middle-income groups, commercial, institutional, recreational and other uses, with no earmarking for low-income groups. These plans are not in consonance with the income distribution structure of cities and towns. The norms of planning including density and development also favour the comparatively better off sections. These deficiencies are further compounded by state agencies, such as development authorities, resorting to auction of the limited land available with them in cities and setting exorbitant benchmarks for the market price of land.*

It is not just the poor but also large sections of the middle classes who are excluded from access to land and housing available in the open market. In cities like Mumbai, more than 80% of the city's population constituting over nine million people cannot afford to buy or rent houses built and marketed by private developers. As a matter of fact, the mighty real estate agencies- builders and developers, cater to just about 15% of the city's population. The excluded population includes 50% of those living in slums, who occupy just 15% of the total developable land, 5% living on footpaths and marginal spaces, 25% living in tenements that are very old and dilapidated. Then there are the 5-10% (figure not established through survey) who live in housing provided by their employees. Mumbai is also worst among the big

metros in respect of the average living space occupied by families. Here, 65% of all households are spaces with one or less than one dwelling room. Such figures may vary in other cities, but in almost all the cities, what is seen is that the vast majority of city population has no access to housing sold in the open market, due to its ridiculously high prices.

According to Harvey (2009), “any successful strategy must appreciate that spatial form and social process are different ways of thinking about the same thing. We must therefore harmonize our thinking about them”. It is imperative that as effective democratic tools of social change, planning and design must be used in the interests of the poor and marginalized sections and freed from the shackles of market control and exclusivity.

## **Planners & Architects**

McGuirk (2014) writes, ‘Lefebvre was right to say that ‘the architect is no more a miracle-worker than the sociologist. Neither can create social relations.’ They can, however, create the channels for those social relations to occur naturally. They can create lines of communication, transport links and reasons for middle-class citizens to overcome their fears and go to the slums. Overcoming prejudice and stigmatisation is essential to making cities more cohesive. Until these methods become more mainstream, we can refer to the architects who practice them as ‘activists’.

‘What can we say about the activists’ methodology? The essential tool of the activist is agency. Here, the architect is a creator of actions, not just forms. The form may or may not be important, but the one thing that the architect must do is creating an opportunity to act. That means choosing a context (in Latin America it will most likely be in the informal city), identifying a problem and creating the conditions necessary to intervene-not for their own glory but for the benefit of the residents (ibid).

Unlike their forebears, today, architects and planners are not the agents of a welfare state. They are mostly seen as mere service providers by builders. Also, most of them keep little or no concern with larger socio-environmental issues or participate individually or collectively in the preparation of plans and policies for the city. When they do participate, they represent or confirm the preferences of the ruling class and the market forces. In many instances they act as direct agents of private investors and developers. In many ways, these professionals are operating within a web of contradictions. The world is a more complicated place, where they have to negotiate

cities governed increasingly by private interests and have to play off the private against the public to get the most out of both.

## **Fragmented Participation**

Planning is important, but it has to be done in a participatory manner. Governments, administrators, land owning agencies and builders resist the idea of peoples' participation, as they see it as a major challenge to their freedom of decision-making. Therefore, participation is deliberately limited to select individuals and groups, who they are comfortable, and who merely endorse the decisions already made. It is for this reason that governments have reduced public participation and opinion into tokenism or a mere formality.

It is government administrators who assume full authority in the planning of cities, serving a link between politicians, builders and developers. In India, we find enough evidence of politicians being builders themselves or closely associated with builders and developers. It is they who decide about planning and design of cities. This compromises town planning standards and public interest, and adversely impacts our cities. It is the recognition and inclusion of the multitude of community organisations and their movements that will enable the achievement of wider participation in decisions relating to all matters that affect them and the city.

## **From Rights to Concessions**

An oppressive trend that has come to prevail, particularly in our liberalized contexts, is a shift from 'rights to concessions'. Public freedom and rights over a wide array of issues have been turned into matters of negotiation, through a simultaneous reduction in public space and participation. Discussions relating to land and development are led by private agencies and NGOs end up bargaining for concessions in money and goods rather than demanding for fulfillment of basic rights. It is only after people register their protests that governments begin to grant some benefits to the public, but that too without altering the very foundations upon which exclusive, private empires are built.

In India, before the liberalization of economy in 1991, peoples' movements in Mumbai, including struggles for housing, were targeted at the government. Post 1991 saw a significant curtailment of space for people to meet and articulate their demands with their elected government. Instead, they are now forced to deal with private agencies - developers, builders, financiers, who have been mandated by

the government to carry out 'public interest' projects. Such a process is steadfastly undermining the larger objective of democratization of cities and therefore must be altered in the interest of a more vibrant and participatory democracy.

## **Stitching the Fragments**

Urban planning and open data has the power if undertaken through democratic movements, to stitch together the disparate city fragments and enable the sharing of resources. Urban planning is also a significant instrument for building resistances to this current phenomenon of fragmentation of cities and for bringing about much needed socio-environmental change towards unification, equity and democratization (P.K. Das in 'Nature of Cities' blog).

The emergence of gated communities is a trend that is furthering the fragmentation of cities into exclusive privatized blocks, while reducing the left over spaces as mere transportation corridors: roads, highways and flyovers that support our increased dependency on motorized transport. As cities expand, public spaces are rapidly shrinking. It needs to be asked: where are the streets where people meet, exchange politics and build social and community networks?

Erosion of public space in both its physical and democratic dimensions is leading to people being excluded from mainstream developments. It imposes enormous burden on people, particularly the poor and the marginalized, while leading to inequality and environmental injustice. These 'development' processes also further alienation and social tensions. Sustainable urban ecology is thus severely fractured.

Our challenge is not only to check the fragmentation of our cities in all its violent dimensions but also build a robust urban ecology rooted in the democratic principles of social and environmental justice. Urban design is an incredible tool for the achievement of this objective. Plans ought to address these issues, and aim to achieve the integration of the vast extent of natural assets with the daily social and cultural life of people.

## **Popularization of Planning & Design**

Mainstream planning and design ideas that predominantly reflect the political ideology and interest of the ruling class and their agents are often in conflict with larger development interests. This has been seen in many examples the world over, including in the historical cases of Haussmann's plans for Paris and Moses' plans

for New York and the protests that followed in both cities. Plans for cities could be utilised for exactly the opposite objective: to achieve social integration by engaging communities as agents of change, as has been championed by Jane Jacob and others (P.K. Das in 'Nature of Cities' blog).

In the context of rapid urbanisation, people's movements in and across cities claiming Urban Planning and Design Rights' have therefore come to be essential. It is heartening that these people are intervening in decisions that affect their lives and questioning the plans and projects that are being forced on them. Communities in different neighborhoods and cities are also demanding public discussion on matters relating to planning and design issues (ibid).

Let's review an example from Mumbai. Recently the Municipal Corporation and the state government put forward the new Draft Development Plan 2012-2032. The plan was clearly anti-people and detrimental to the city's ecology. It avoided the question of slums redevelopment and its integration with the city, and proposed plans that would further cut down the meager open spaces. Mumbai has a miserable ratio of less than 1.5 m<sup>2</sup> per person open space. In comparison, London has 31.68, New York, 26.4, Tokyo, 3.96. In this context, citizens groups, NGOs, workers, slum-dwellers and even ordinary middle class people organized public meetings in protest. These concerted effort to build public opinion forced the government to recall the plan and start the process all over again. Herein, the consultants appointed earlier for the preparation of the plan were terminated. Since then, the municipal corporation has been having public hearings, and evaluating over 50,000 suggestions and objections filed by individuals and organizations. Hopefully a more acceptable plan will now emerge that reflects the development needs and demands of all the people.

## **Planning & Design**

We have to place urban planning and design at the center stage of decision-making process and undertake comprehensive, integrated and inclusive planning that takes into account all existing activity and land occupation patterns. If such an approach is accepted, many conflicts and critical roadblocks could be avoided. Displacements could be reduced to a minimum and changes made towards the achievement of higher standards of urban living.

Urban Planning and Design should therefore be considered a 'right' and brought to public dialogue. In fact, claiming 'urban planning and design rights' needs to be

understood as part of larger movement for claiming 'right to the city', as much as other democratic rights movements. In other words, to claim urban planning and design rights is to assert peoples' power over the ways in which our cities are created, with a determination to build socially and environmentally just and democratic cities.

## **Architecture and Democratic Practices**

There is also need to relate planning and architecture with larger democratic movements and to use it as an instrument to mobilize communities for political action. The engagement of an architect as an activist enriches the architect's role and position in society to a much greater degree, wherein s/he begins to co-relate design with larger and more important determining factors of social and political importance.

Designs for public projects can become an instrument for mobilization of movements on development. Designs often attract peoples' attention, when presented in a community. People begin to understand the different dimensions of the project and chip in their views. They are also able to comprehend the physicality of the project and the important changes it would bring to their neighbourhood. Regular discussions on the design and aspects of its implementation are a way to thus engage more and more people with the project. The implementation of city plans and programs with peoples' participation is therefore a significant instrument for mobilizing larger political struggles for equality and justice.

## **Expanding public spaces**

There is a need to prepare city development plans, which emphasise an expansion of public spaces. Today, deprivation of open spaces, destruction of the environment and the abuse of our natural resources including water bodies have rendered our cities into a regrettable state. This is further exacerbated by high cost of urban transportation, lack of housing for a majority of the people, and inadequate and costly amenities.

A good city should have a good community life. Today urbanized centers world over have a tendency to create individual spaces and gated communities, which result in aloofness, loneliness and depressed lifestyles. Individualism and self-gratification as promoted by the markets takes over. A sense of community fades and individualism takes over. This needs to be addressed and can be done by building more public spaces. According to urbanologist Jan Gehl,



*When the city whole heartedly invites to walk, stand and sit in the city's common space a new urban pattern emerges: more people walk and stay in the city. We need to design cities as meeting places – for small events and larger perspectives. City designers need to set the stage for necessary activities like walking, optional activities like enjoying a view and social activities like tempting public interaction. Public institutions tempt public interaction and greatly enhance and consolidate social, cultural and community aspirations. Historically public institutions like libraries, cultural centers, theatre, planned squares and plaza's, etc. have led to significant movements, demonstrations and alternate thinking. For now and for the future it is necessary to establish public institutions to contribute and enrich the life of all the people in the city and facilitate growth of public engagement and knowledge for human development. By building public spaces we weave psychological and intellectual growth into a comprehensive physical plan while bringing substance to the notion of public realm.*

The objectives for any city should be to expand its open spaces by identifying its natural assets, preserving them and designing them to turn into public spaces for recreation. The aim should also be to conserve natural assets, protect eco-sensitive borders, prepare comprehensive waterfronts/natural assets ecological plans, establish walking and cycling tracks to induce health enhancing behavior while promoting energy efficient transport and promote social, cultural and recreational opportunities (P.K Das in 'Open Mumbai')

## **Neighborhood-based city planning**

Through a neighborhood based development approach it would be possible to decentralize and localize projects, breaking away from mega-monolithic planning and design ideas with enormous investments that impose unbearable burdens on the lives of most people. Such planning also facilitates closer interaction between people and creates a more collaborative approach to making cities. For instance, the various 'reclaiming public spaces movements' in Mumbai neighbourhoods such as Bandra and Juhu have allowed the immediate reclamation, redesign and re-programming of public space. These interventions would never have been anticipated by a master plan for the city (Juhu Vision Plan, P.K.Das).

Integrating slums and other informal settlements with various neighborhoods is a necessary condition for the achievement of a sustainable city. These settlements should not be pushed to the peripheries, as that only worsens their exclusion. In cities of the Global South, large numbers of poor people have been evicted to the periphery, a trend that must stop forthwith. Therein, a host of issues have to be addressed for their integration, including services, infrastructure, transportation and employment generation, among others.

City governments should actually not give up the possibility of assigning land and housing for the poor in the various neighborhoods of their city. This is possible to achieve to a great extent in every city, however built or occupied it may be. In Mumbai, following protracted struggles by the slum-dwellers, the government has now been forced to accept the demand of according recognition to slum land and the slum-dwellers, though that is fraught with many contradictions.

It is urban planning and design that provides an opportunity for the achievement of the objective of unification of people, places and nature. It is argued that participation in urban planning and design need to be considered a right, and the popularization and democratization of the same should be seen as an important step. We can plan cities by taking into account existing land occupation patterns, particularly slums and informal sectors, rather than causing displacements due to the imposition of land use plans that are based on skewed planning standards and vested private and political interests. Also, natural areas and assets must form an integral aspect of city planning and design programs in which people are considered as custodians.

## **4. Housing and Urbanization of Cities**

### **Housing**

Often in matters relating to housing and urban development, materialistic ideas and financial interests take privilege. Architects and planners are also overtly obsessed with the physical state of housing, with little concern for peoples' needs, aspirations and demands. Also, housing is dealt, in most instances, independently of the larger process of urbanization. Under the free-market economy, housing is also considered a product, a tradable value that can generate profit. People are expected to adjust to the physical spaces produced by the developers that often lack urban design and planning standards. This is particularly so in housing for the poor.

Housing development should be first considered a socio-political process and thereafter a form of space and structure. An integrated planning and development of social housing would contribute significantly to building higher standards of urban living. As such, the struggle for housing is essentially a democratic rights struggle and peoples' active participation is therefore central to its success. In essence, the movements and struggles for social housing are an effective democratic means for the social, cultural and political change towards the achievement of equal and just cities.

## **Urbanization of Cities**

It is necessary to understand that urbanization and city making are not synonymous, as it is generally made out to be. Even though city making is an important means for the achievement of urbanization, the two are independent of each other.

Cities, which are expanding rapidly in size and population, are not a model of desirable and sustainable urbanization. These cities have been growing without providing its people with necessary conditions to live and work with dignity. Sadly, these are also being rapidly divided into disparate fragments of exclusive and marginalized communities. The exclusion of more and more people from the benefits of development, particularly access to formal and dignified housing is squarely a failure of the current pattern of urbanization. It is only achievement of higher human development standards, along with equity and justice for all, that would serve as true indicators of successful urbanization and city making.

## **Housing & Social Developmen**

McGuirk (2014) states,

*A house is indeed a static object, but within a larger layout with many other houses and a host of amenities and infrastructure. It is the relation between a house and its setting that must necessarily be dynamic with variations and open to a process of change as newer amenities and community needs are required over time. For it is the collective and shared spaces that provides the foundation to building communities and networks. In an event, that most cities are subject to, that certain minimum density has to be achieved in order to justify land prices and land-use efficiency. Therefore multistoried buildings with certain minimum standardization are inevitable'. In such blocks, while growth of each house or changes as may be desired by the occupant(s), may not be practical or viable in structural terms.*

Social housing is an important area of concern within the discussion on urbanization. I discuss this here with an example of a social housing project in the town of Eisen Hutten Stadt in East Germany (See box). This town was planned and built in early 1950s, after the end of the World War II, to provide housing to the homeless. A steel plant was also built in proximity at the same time to provide jobs. I describe below my experience of visiting a neighbourhood in the city.

#### Socialist housing in Eisen Hutten Stadt, East Germany

I visited the city of Eisen Hutten Stadt in December 2017 and met a couple Mr. Hans Joachini Friebel and Mrs. Ane Katrina Friebel, aged 75 and 72 in their house. They are the grandparents of my son-in-law. I had a long discussion with them on a host of issues, including housing. They related to me their journey during the war when they were driven out by the Russians from an area in East Germany that was merged with Poland. At the time, they were not married or known to each other. They have been living in this beautiful, one and a half bedroom apartment since the mid 50s. When I met them, it was Christmas time and they had nicely decorated the house. We had some wonderful lunch at home followed by a variety of freshly baked cakes. I was moved by their warmth and hospitality.

The couple is now happily retired from their jobs. Mr Friebel was a butcher and Mrs Friebel worked in a community center. Together they get a pension from the government to the tune of 3000 Euros a month. They pay a rent of 400 Euros per month to the government, which is less than 15% of their income. Initially they had to pay 4000 euros as their contribution, which was taken care of by their employees who recovered the amount from their salary over a long period.

Criticism of this model of socialist mass housing that I have read is often rooted in political disagreements with socialism and socialist ideology, and less on reason and objective analysis of the projects themselves. Most such criticism deliberately ignores the time and context in which these projects were undertaken, and thus also their relevance. One of the common criticisms is about the monotonous designs of the building blocks. Here one should consider that housing design and planning is not only about aesthetics, or the nature and quality of structures alone, but also, and more so, about the forms of spaces and structures it generates. We should also remember the objectives of building such homogeneous and harmonious spaces, which is to harness community networks and strength. The speed of production, number

of houses achieved and the economy of development are also conditions one should regard as important. Eisen Hutten Stadt is a good example of social housing where I found all these concerns well addressed.

As such, today we find that even in neoliberal contexts, cities, such as Mumbai, have exactly the same kind of repetitive building blocks. Such blocks are being built all over the city under the slums redevelopment schemes and other social housing projects by the state, including as reconstruction of old dilapidated buildings. What is worse is that very little space is being provided between different blocks, and there is little provision of open spaces and amenities for a host of community interests. In contrast are the open spaces and amenities in this neighbourhood of Eisen Hutten Stadt, which gives it place a distinct feel. It is these collective and shared spaces that sustain the Eisen Hutten Stadt community. The lesson here is one should resist judging the values of a housing project merely by viewing its buildings in isolation.

When I went out with my friends for a walk in the neighborhood, alongside a river, then I saw the various housing clusters, schools, old peoples' homes, community centers, playgrounds etc. I was moved to see how well the needs of a community were understood and incorporated in the project design. As we walked along, my friends were greeted by several other people who were also taking leisurely walks. This was Christmas time and most people were enjoying their holidays.

As an architect, what was most surprising and heartening for me to see was the ongoing restoration and redevelopment of a few buildings, some of it completed. These buildings had a contemporary look and a refreshing change from what was built over 60-65 years back. In this process of restoration, the authorities have provided additional space to each house, including new balconies. There is no trace of the old monotonous look. This is an interesting example where the issue of monotony is overcome during renovation, which becomes necessary over time, for many reasons.

I can indeed relate many positive aspects of the community life in this town, including the pride and dignity of its citizens, but what remains a concern for me is that there has been no space provided by the authorities for participation of this community in decisions that affect their lives. It is a government authority that looks after the maintenance and governance of this township, including carrying out the changes that are required by way of renovation and addition of new buildings and facilities.

It remains without a doubt that the collaboration of government agencies with communities must form the sole basis of governance, including in matters of housing. But sadly, this process is also not given any consideration in most democratic or market oriented economies.

## **Housing Design**

Questions relating to Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and density are important issues to deal with in affordable housing plans, particularly the context of massive housing shortfall in cities. Today, city governments are on the path of granting higher and higher FAR in order to boost development and with a hope that it will generate more housing stock. Mainstream planners and architects too believe and propagate this idea that what is needed today is increased supply for which higher FAR is the solution. The World Bank also promulgates this idea, and it seems it is part of their funding policy.

High-rise buildings with 20-25 floors are being pushed for rehabilitation of slum dwellers, such as in Mumbai. This is certainly undesirable and unsustainable for the poor and the city, due to lack of supporting infrastructure and support in case of fire and other emergencies. As such, in Mumbai, in spite of an increase in FAR, the shortage in housing has only increased. This is certainly not because of high level of migration into the city or rapid increase in its population, for in the past ten years or so, there has been a decline in the rate of migration. In fact, certain wards or localities have also registered a drop in population. It is because while producing more built-up space, higher FAR does not necessarily address the problem of shortage of affordable housing and amenities. More construction does not plug the shortfall. It should be emphasized that insufficient and sub-standard services and infrastructure cannot support higher FAR and higher volumes of construction in many cities of the Global South.

## **Self-Help Housing**

A discussion on the case of ‘Sanjay Gandhi Nagar’, a slum that occupied land in Nariman Point, a high profile business district of Mumbai, brings out the contradictions of self-help housing in terms of social, aspirational and political interests in the current context of high density and high land values in cities. What follows is an extract from a publication by the organization Nivara Hakk:

Sanjay Gandhi Nagar, located at Nariman Point, India’s premier business and residential district was one of the first examples of large scale resistance to slum demolitions in Mumbai in 1986, and in many ways, it catalysed the

formation and spread of Nivara Hakk. It also represents the brutal irony of Mumbai's housing crisis – the rich and the well-heeled staying in skyscrapers cheek-by-jowl with slums that house their maids, cooks and drivers; and yet it is the same bureaucrats and opinion makers who plan and justify the eviction of the slum dwellers without batting an eyelid.

In March 13, 1986, 300 huts were demolished at Sanjay Gandhi Nagar slum at Nariman Point by the BMC without any warning. Locals had received demolition notices earlier in November and January and they had approached the then Maharashtra housing minister Dr. V. Subramanian seeking help to create a co-operative society for the slum community, and to construct buildings on the same plot or allocate an alternative site. Following this meeting, a survey was undertaken by the Rehvasi Sanghatna, but the demolition came as a surprise to the slum-dwellers. No alternate accommodation was provided. According to the Collector, that land was earmarked for Post & Telegraph department, Fire Brigade department and a new MLA hostel, and the demolition was to make way for these facilities.

Upper class pressure for demolition was obvious from the buildings that surrounded the slum. One of them was the government building 'Sarang' that was occupied by top bureaucrats, some ministers and judges; and the housing minister V. Subramanian himself. Interestingly, most of the maids and cooks in these buildings were women from Sanjay Gandhi Nagar. The State government promised alternative plots to those slum dwellers whose names appeared in the census conducted between 1976 and 1980 or whose names were in electoral rolls before 1980, but there were hardly any from Sanjay Gandhi Nagar who fell in this 'rehab' bracket.

Sanjay Gandhi Nagar was a scene of despair on the fateful day of the demolition in March 1986 as the poor residents sought to salvage their belongings and protect their young ones from getting hurt. Demolition squads, protected by truckloads of police, carried away tin scaffolding and other structural materials, which had ironically been given to them by the government only a few months earlier in November 1985, following a devastating fire. The families then took refuge on the footpaths across the road, and received support from Nivara Hakk. Shabana Azmi and Anand Patwardhan along with local residents launched a protest fast. The struggle went on over several months and saw marches and, gheraos of the Collector and Housing minister V Subramanian, and was widely reported by the media.

Ultimately, the government yielded and the Rehvasi Sanghatna and Nivara Hakk succeeded in acquiring a 3.0 acre plot in Dindoshi, near Goregaon. The land, deeply quarried to 40 ft. depth, was a private deal negotiated by then housing secretary D. K. Afzalpurkar with the F.E. Dinshaw Trust, and then handed over to the Sanjay Gandhi Rehvasi Sanghatna in 1991. At the same time, another 0.5 acre was handed to Nivara Hakk Welfare Centre for development of facilities and a centre of advocacy for slum-dwellers and housing rights.

However, problems for the slum dwellers did not stop after the March 1986 demolitions. In the meantime, Nivara Hakk approached the state government to support development work in various slums. Sanjay Gandhi Nagar, rehabilitated in Dindoshi, Goregaon needed levelling and land filling, sewage system for 300 hutments, construction of toilets at various points, water distribution system, access road and internal pathways and boundary fencing. Till 1993, the BMC did not carry out any land filling work as promised.

The answer came in the form of self-help housing with Nivara Hakk helping with layout and common area development. People here as in most other slums and squatter settlements, built their own houses and developed the common areas. The plot sizes given to each of the families were the same. However, the materials used in the construction of houses and the size of the house depended upon its affordability for each family. People's priority of spending for housing was very low with limited income, as medical care, children's education, clothing and food were more important. Therefore, houses were built gradually as and when money was available. Renovating and upgrading their homes was a long term housing plan. As a result, houses were built independently and grew differently, the expressions reflecting each family's needs and life-styles and their economic condition and also their attitudes and interaction.

Planning for the rehabilitation of a 'slum' had to necessarily incorporate the above realities while generating harmony and an identity. Nivara, guided by architect PK Das, prepared a layout plan outlining the position of common toilets, water taps, community center, society office, accesses and open spaces. The plan proposed plots larger than the plinth area of every house in order to create a compulsory, open-to sky space, a place to cook, sit out, wash clothes and sleep. Common, open spaces were along the accesses forming chowks for get-togethers and spaces for the children to play. Since every house was to be



built and extended according to the individual's means, subsequent repairs and maintenance too became simple without dependence on professional help, nor linked to the status or consent of neighbors. An open space in the north, along the hill, acted as a buffer and protected the houses from possible landslides. A fairly large part was to be used for common facilities such as toilets and water taps. Also, extensive tree plantation was planned. A large, common space required for get-togethers, festivals and children to play was provided along with the welfare centre.

But for most residents of the new colony at Dindoshi, their aspiration lay in living in multi-storey buildings. The opportunity came when around 2005, a local builder offered a rehabilitation package to the residents. Sanjay Gandhi Rehvasi Sanghatna, after detailed negotiations, entered into an agreement for the development of their 3-acre property. The broad outline of the agreement was: JP Infra would construct 300 sq. ft. homes in 20-storey buildings in situ in one part of the property; each resident would receive Rs.6 lakh as ex gratia payment; and rent of premise would be reimbursed during the period of this construction.

After entering into this agreement, the project has been implemented as a Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) project with the 300 residents to be accommodated in two 20-storey buildings in around one-third of the plot, while the remaining 2 acres or so will be used by the builder to develop semi-luxury 2 and 3 BHK apartments for free sale in the housing market to cross subsidise the one-room tenements and to make a margin of profit for itself.

From Nivara Hakk's point of view, the residents, who had fought a heroic battle for homes and shelter and won, thereafter squandered a great opportunity – the opportunity to develop for themselves a progressive and modern community and neighbourhood with sustainable density, without multi-storey buildings that will over the years demand a heavy price for maintenance. Effectively, nearly three acres of land, won with the blood and sweat of slum-dwellers has passed into the hands of a for-profit middle and upper class housing project.

## **Understanding Slums**

Slums are not homogeneous communities but are a microcosm of the society at large with kinds of social differences and conflicts. There are critical differences between individuals and groups of people living in slums, not only in terms of their incomes but also in their needs and aspirations. Residing in a slum is not a preferred choice of

the poor, as some would have us believe. It is a form of forced ghettoization as Das et al in the forthcoming Nivara Hakk publication writes,

Living conditions in most slums are deplorable and oppressive. Low-grade, and in-sufficient services and amenities coupled with overflowing drains and garbage pileup has led to unhygienic living conditions, thereby adversely affecting the health and laboring capacity of slum dwellers. Repairing and retrofitting the various ad hoc civic services and collapsing infrastructure, including the houses people have built, will not work, a planned redevelopment is the need of the hour. It is also true that rule of law seldom works in these pockets of parallel power where a nexus of slumlords, government officials and police, and political representatives control and manage land and the way houses and services are built and distributed.

According to McGuirk (2014), the challenge now is “not just how to rehabilitate the slums, by inserting necessary services and improving quality of life, but how to integrate them into the city as a whole, creating the connections and flows, the points of communication and inclusion that will dissolve the lines of exclusion and collision. Urbanism in the informal city has to be smarter than in the past; it needs to be flexible, so that it can handle unplanned change”.

A historic bluff has been perpetrated under the provision of ‘free housing’ through slums redevelopment schemes. These schemes have been used by private builders and developers to grab slum land and force poor families to often part with the only asset they have – their meager hovels. Often times, the slum communities are caught between warring builders. And a huge number of slum dwellers on grounds that their records are in the ‘grey zone’. Altogether, the history of these rehabilitation schemes shows that they have hardly helped to bolster the right to housing in the city; if anything, they have undermined the movement for affordable housing.

The housing question can only be addressed through the allocation of adequate land for affordable housing and amenities. This has to be therefore central to government policy on this issue. Solutions based on negotiation with private builders and developers do not tenable in the long run.

The following is an example of a successful people’s struggle for housing rights that Nivara Hakk waged in Mumbai’s complex social laboratory. It involved the rehabilitation of 25,000 families who lived in the slums bordering the Sanjay Gandhi

National Park. After over two decades of struggle and lobbying, the rehabilitation township – Sangharsh Nagar – is today perhaps the largest urban rehab project in Asia, and among one of the most successful experiments, centering as it does on the inclusionary rights of the city’s citizens.

#### Understanding slums rehabilitation and Sangharsh Nagar, Mumbai:

On May 1, 2007, the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Vilasrao Deshmukh, handed over the keys of 4,142 homes to families from the slum communities residing near the Sanjay Gandhi National Park. Today, the first phase of the project is complete and nearly 12,000 families live in small apartments in seven-storey buildings, leaving behind their miserable hovels on the unfriendly slopes of the forested national park.

It was a long and difficult struggle that began in 1992, overcoming on the way huge obstacles and challenges. Soon after suffering the communal strife in 1992-93, these slum communities in the national park stretching from Goregaon to Dahisar in the Western suburbs and Bhandup to Thane on the Central side, faced waves of demolitions and eviction by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and state government. However, they survived on the strength of street struggles and a series of court orders that gave temporary relief.

In 1998, the Bombay High Court ordered that they be rehabilitated outside the Park within 18 months but the land allocated by the government was in Kalyan and Shirdon talukas, more than 60 kms outside the city. The slum communities expectedly resisted shifting to these far-out sites as it would have spelt economic ruin for them.

People from all walks of life joined hands to demand a viable solution. Former Prime Minister V.P. Singh joined the stage with Nivara Hakk’s Shabana Azmi in 2000 to lead street protests. A panel of retired High Court judges that included Justices Rajinder Sachar, Hosbet Suresh and S.M. Daud recorded the ground reality of brutal evictions and arrests by the police and forest officials.

As a way out of the imbroglio, in December 1999, the Maharashtra government proposed a rehab project under the Slum Redevelopment Authority (SRA) on a 34.41 hectare (85 acre) swathe of land at Chandivali, owned by the developers Sumer Corporation. A detailed plan and designs

of buildings was prepared by architect P.K.Das through a participatory programme, for housing 25,000 families in two phases. The project was finally approved by SRA in 2000 and construction was launched soon after.

The first phase houses 12,000 units, each of 225 sq.ft. carpet area spread over 18.22 ha (45 acres), divided into 15 clusters, with 16 buildings in each cluster. In terms of quality, the design with cross-ventilation and the feel of an apartment have made the houses superior to the standard slum rehab building, which is usually constructed with a central corridor with 45 train compartment style rooms on either side. Phase II of the project is yet to come up, and will house another 13,000 families.

With nearly 25,000 families expected to finally inhabit the complex, the rehab scheme is equivalent to a 'C' Class town. Planned as an all-inclusive township, 'Sangharsh Nagar' on the drawing board has two playgrounds and 60 community open spaces. Included in the plans are also two hospitals, a common market area, two large community halls as well as a string of primary health centres. A central courtyard has been provided in each cluster of buildings, in which vehicles have been banned.

Significantly, the rulebook for slum rehab projects does not envisage township planning and there are no provisions for common civic and recreational needs like playgrounds, markets and hospitals. The challenge therefore before Nivara Hakk was to ensure that these elements be included in the project to make the rehabilitation process comprehensive. The task also included working closely with the Municipal Corporation to ensure provision of garbage disposal, markets, accessible roads, and public transportation.

The Chandivali project is significant for Mumbai not only for the large number of housing units and its sheer size, but also for the impact it has made on the struggle for housing rights, including claims for right to land and the formulation of various housing policies relating to slum rehabilitation and redevelopment by the government. Also, the project has suggested new ways of providing various social amenities such as balwadis, schools, health care and community centers. Another contribution is the provision of open spaces, which was done through comprehensive planning, in spite of the high FSI that is expected to be consumed. Most importantly, the successful formation of over 200 cooperative societies and a Mahasangh, necessary for self-governance, has been a significant lesson.

These voluntary efforts and struggles like that of the slum communities of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park are a beacon of hope for the slum dwellers. But the key to solving the complex problems of housing lies with the government. It must stop its approach of making cosmetic changes and instead come up with a slew of policy measures which will bring long-term relief to the poor and homeless. In a word, it must abandon its reliance on the 'free market' to solve the housing problem and must intervene aggressively to create pools of land banks and housing stock aimed at providing affordable homes. In the post liberalisation period since 1991, governments have parted with substantial public land and other resources to private developers in the belief that all development, including public housing and social infrastructure, would be provided by them. Not surprisingly, the privatisation of development has miserably failed in providing any relief or solution to the housing crisis, as also for other needs such as affordable health care and education.

## **Affordable Housing**

In the context of the urban poor lack of affordable housing is a multi-faceted form of deprivation. Often the lack of affordability results in the households having to spend a large proportion of their meagre income on housing and thus having a substantially reduced amount to spend on other needs (Kutty, 2005). This negatively impacts the ability of the households to spend on essentials such as food, health care and education.

Das et al (forthcoming) suggest that 'Affordability' in the context of housing is a much-abused term and means different things to different people. It is frequently used in relation to income, the connotation changing as income levels vary. Lack of an 'affordable' home to the poor means they are forced to lead a life devoid of the basic human right to a dignified and safe dwelling. According to the 'Model State Affordable Housing Policy for Urban Areas, 2014', by the Ministry of Housing & Poverty Alleviation (MHUPA) in India: "Generally affordability is taken as 3-4 times the annual income. However in all schemes and projects where subsidy is offered by the State/Central Governments for individual dwelling units with a carpet area of not more than 60 sq. m., then the price range of a maximum of 5 times the annual income of the household, either as a single unit or part of a building complex with multiple dwelling units will be taken as affordability entitlement."

When houses are further away from the city centre, affording them is easier (Gopalan, et al, 2015). However, the economic cost of transportation increases. In that sense, the housing cost is replaced by transportation cost (ibid). For instance, in Mumbai, given the linear topography of the city, the travel time from the periphery to the workplace can be as much as 2.5 hours.

Costs related to maintenance, power, water and property tax also needs to be taken into account (ibid). Often, it has been observed that slum dwellers settled in formal housing find it difficult to pay these costs given their meagre incomes. As a result, they move out and shift to another slum where the purchase price and/or rent is cheaper while informally letting out their property or selling it. Similarly, in many slum redevelopment projects, certain beneficiary slum dwellers have sold or rented their tenements to move to cheaper places, including other slums, in order to meet healthcare, educational and other social needs. Hence, it is important to take into account the many factors and costs for the successful achievement of the target of accommodating all citizens in formal housing.

It is also important to consider the 'liveability' of the dwelling and the surrounding areas. It is a crucial that physical infrastructure and amenities are provided in the area where the dwelling is located (ibid). Adequate shelter means more than a roof over one's head: It also means adequate privacy; adequate space; physical accessibility; adequate security; adequate lighting and ventilation; adequate basic infrastructure – all of which should be available at affordable cost" (High Level Task Force on Affordable Housing for All, India, December 2008, p. 7).

There has also been a major shift in government's perspective – from understanding housing as a social function to housing as a commodity that should be monetised to the fullest extent. In doing so, governments have often aimed at extracting the maximum possible price for land under its control. Consequently, the price of the land in the city and its neighbourhood has increased sharply. Land being the most crucial and most substantial part of the cost structure of a housing unit, this monetisation has contributed to housing becoming unaffordable for the majority of the population.

The need for shelter is a basic human need and every city must be able to provide its citizens with a safe, secure and affordable home without the constant threat of forced eviction and displacement. The evidence from India suggests the failure of the

market in providing affordable housing and the government on its part has preferred to turn a blind eye to this unfolding tragedy.

## 5. Way Forward

The UN Habitat III conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development held in Quito, Ecuador in mid-October 2016, published various issue papers for discussion and finalisation. The chapter on Housing states:

- (1) Adequate housing is recognised as a part of the right to an adequate standard of living in international instruments including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” (Government of India is a signatory to this covenant).
- (2) Adequate housing must provide more than four walls and a roof. A number of conditions must be met before particular forms of shelter can be considered to constitute adequate housing”. One of these conditions that is significant is: “Affordable housing is not adequate if its cost threatens or compromises the occupants’ enjoyment of other human rights”. Provision of affordable and adequate housing must be therefore judged from an assessment of its success or failure in terms of human rights.
- (3) The solution of housing challenges cannot depart from addressing the root causes that violate the principles of non-discrimination and equality in the access to housing, not only on the basis of gender and geography, but also on the basis of race, culture, religion, age, disability and social and economic status”. In short, such an assessment suggests that housing is not a commodity that can be manufactured in repeated and monotonous building blocks, packed without open spaces and social amenities with the sole obsession of maximising financial turnover, currently the single most dominating factor in the dysfunctional markets. The Habitat III issue paper further states:
- (4) Inadequate housing has contributed to health inequality and risk exposure. The home is a major environment of exposure to hazards and health threatening factors due to lack of habitability, overcrowding, and inadequate services, among others. Crowding is among the most serious threats as it enhances the transmission of diseases amongst the household members, especially children, elders and those with disabilities as they spend more of their time at home. In addition, many environmental risks are associated with the poor quality of housing structures and their location”. Both private and government housing

finance agencies have considered housing finance through mortgages. In this regard, the Habitat III issue paper on housing states:

- (5) Enabling housing finance through mortgages has been quite well responded to by governments but has often been feasible for the middle- and high-income groups rather than the most needy 60 to 80 percent of the population. Subsidies on residential mortgages have encouraged people to borrow but they are flowing to the 20 to 40 percent richest income groups, which is to those who need least.

Today, urbanization is one of the key global challenges. Governments would have to take big steps in making important commitments beyond the market for ensuring access to land, housing and amenities by all. Ecological concerns should be paramount to such policies and plans, which includes not only protecting natural assets but also nourishing and expanding them, in order to build a sustainable urban ecology. What is also required is a unification of the fragmented city landscapes, through participatory and democratic means that will enable the achievement of just and equitable urbanization for now and the future. Altogether, our collective decisions should support the objectives of the New Urban Agenda and also define the next steps for localisation and implementation of these objectives.

**Author' note:** *This paper is an outcome of my experiences in the city of Mumbai and the ideas and thoughts expressed in my writings and talks over the years, as an architect and active member Nivara Hakk which is an housing rights movement. The paper makes substantial references to Nivara Hakk publications, including quoting select text from them. Similarly, references are made to and quotes drawn from my writings in 'Nature of Cities' blog. I have also relied upon and quoted Justin McGuirk writings in his book Radical Cities: Across Latin America in Search of A New Architecture.*

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## Chapter 3

# RETHINKING INFORMALITY IN TIMES OF NEW GLOBAL AGENDAS AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

*Lena Simet and Melissa De la Cruz*

## 1. Introduction

The world has seen impressive progress over the past 25 years. People live longer, more children are in school, more households have access to basic services, and global poverty has declined (UNDP 2016). Yet, this progress has been uneven and has left out many. In addition, today's geo-political realities are posing new challenges that may threaten some of the progress that has been achieved. Signs of increasing socio-economic inequality are clear even in developed countries. At the same time, populist and nationalistic political movements have regained strength, and an economic and climate induced refugee crisis has shaken parts of Europe, Africa, and the Middle-East. Meanwhile, technological innovations such as increased access to smart phones and open-source applications have opened the door for a "third industrial revolution," which stands to possibly undermine labor unions and the enforceability of national labor laws, while encouraging new forms of gig, informal, and precarious work.

An important global development is also growing urbanisation. More people now live in cities than ever before. In 2017, more than half (54 %) of the world's population lived in urban areas. People are drawn to the cities for higher wages and a better quality of life. Cities potentially offer a range of opportunities for human and economic development, including spaces for modernization, cultural enrichment and social change. According to UNDESA (2016), by 2050, 66 %, of the world will be urbanised, with the highest rates of urban growth in low- and

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1. "The Third Industrial Revolution" The Economist. April 2012.  
<<http://www.economist.com/node/21553017>> accessed on 10 Jan 2018

middle-income countries. This rapid urban growth, combined with new forms of technology represents an opportunity for economic development. Yet, it requires careful planning and attention from multiple stakeholders to ensure that no one is left behind in this process. Managing urban growth is therefore one of the defining challenges of the 21st century, particularly in the most poor and vulnerable countries where institutional capacity is weakest.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its development framework seek to address some of these challenges, and has laid out a groundbreaking vision of our future - “a more peaceful, prosperous, and just world”. In 2015, 193 Heads of State unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda. Some of its aims include safe working conditions, clean air, unpolluted waterways, modern energy services, affordable reliable transport, and universal access to healthcare. It also mentions an array of institutional preconditions to achieve these aims, such as participatory decision making at all levels.

The 2030 Agenda is also committed to reducing urban poverty and inequality. On similar lines, the New Urban Agenda calls for more sustainable patterns of urbanisation that better respond to the challenges of our time: inequality, climate change, informality, insecurity, and unsustainable forms of urban expansion. In 2015, two-thirds of the world’s population worked in the informal economy (OECD 2016), and nearly half of all workers were employed in vulnerable positions (ILO 2017). In order to fulfill the 2030 Agendas’ call to “leave no one behind,” fostering economic growth is therefore not enough. Addressing urban informality and understanding the strong linkages between the formal and informal sectors will play a major role in the agendas’ implementation.

As a first step, the contributions of urban informal workers to economy and society need to be recognized, valued and supported. There needs to be a clearer understanding of how cities function as labour markets, including the heterogeneous and flexible nature of informal work within and across cities. This should be followed by steps to extend social protection and security to informal sector workers, such as pensions and health care. They also need to be supported by strong labor market institutions and a strict enforcement of minimum wage regulations.

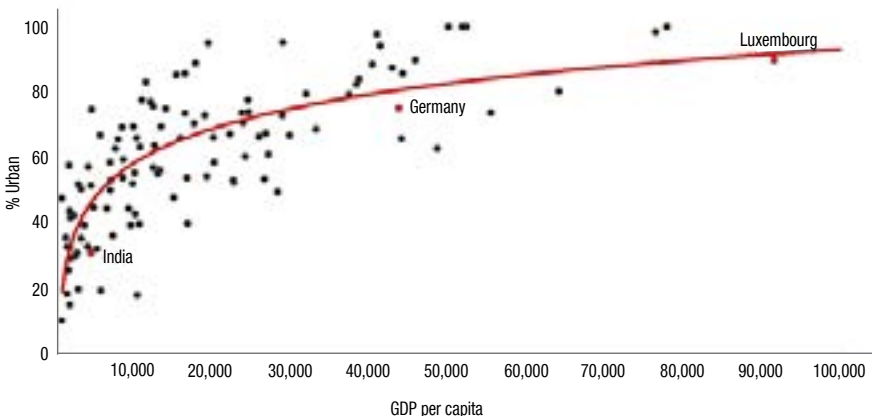
## 2. Urbanisation and Economic Growth

The relation between urbanisation and economic growth has been an important area of research. This section discusses some of the emergent perspectives on the same.

As has been mentioned before, cities attract all types of people because of a variety of socio-economic opportunities. Even in periods of economic crisis, cities often remain as spaces of economic growth. All the richest nations of the world, such as Germany and Luxembourg, are highly urbanised (70% to 90%), generating more than half of their GDP in urban-based economic activities. In contrast, some of the poorest nations are predominantly rural, such as India, Sri Lanka and Uganda, which are urbanised to an extent of 32%, 18%, and 15% respectively. The most successful economies in Africa and Asia are urbanising rapidly, such as Kenya, Vietnam and Indonesia. Within the last 15 years itself, these three countries have had an urban population growth rate of at least 3% per year. These global trends correspond to the theory that a country's GDP rises alongside a rise in its urban population (World Bank 2009). Historically, "very few countries have reached income levels of US\$10,000 per capita before reaching about 60 percent urbanisation" (Spence et al. 2009, p.3). And projections for future economic growth in all countries demonstrate a trend towards greater concentration of economic activity in urban areas of all sizes (OECD 2016).

The graph below clearly demonstrates this positive correlation between economic growth and urbanisation. As countries become richer, they also become more urban.

**Figure 1: Relationship between GDP per capita and urbanisation across countries, 2014. India, Germany, and Luxembourg representing three different stages on the spectrum of urbanisation**



(Source: World Bank - World Development Indicators).. Share of China in Global Export of Commodities (%)

This positive correlation can be understood by the relationship between the efficiencies of agglomeration economies and location. A large body of literature explains as to why cities attract businesses, services and industries (see Duranton and Puga 2013). New enterprises concentrate in cities because they benefit from many other economies of scale located close to their operations, such as other firms, services, and skilled people. These attractive factors are often referred to as pull factors for urban migration, and stand in contrast to the push factors, such as agricultural and climate related stresses in the countryside. Further, urban economic growth not only provides many local multiplier effects for local use and consumption, but also generates important revenue for city governments. Agglomeration, when accompanied by density, allows for reduction in cost of production of goods and services while providing greater access to an ever-wealthier urban labor force. A cycle of value creation is thus generated.

There are however, other, differing views on this relation. Turok and McGranahan (2013) caution us on this tendency to equate urbanisation with economic growth, and say that “urbanisation is often conflated with agglomeration, but they are not synonymous, especially if the fastest growing areas are small cities and towns rather than major cities (Ibid, p. 466).” Others have pointed out, and importantly so, that unfettered urban economic growth also has negative “externalities”, such as environmental degradation, including air and water pollution, urban poverty and inequality. In other words, urban economic growth by itself does not produce livable, healthy, or inclusive cities and it is therefore the task of governments to implement laws and regulations that remove or reduce these tradeoff effects.

A central concern is how rapid urbanisation is accompanied by growth in poverty and informality. While people in cities generally have higher income levels compared to those in rural areas, the massive demographic transformation is also referred to as “the urbanisation of poverty” (see Martine 2012). In Latin America for example, the region that experienced an average economic growth rate of about 5% between 2005 to 2007, more than 350 million people live below \$3,000 a year, and 120 million survive with less than \$2 a day. Moreover, an increasing number of urban dwellers work in the informal sector. In many countries, such as India, the share of jobs outside formal structures is estimated to exceed half of all non-agricultural jobs, and almost 80% if agricultural jobs are included. In South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the average share of informal employment is about 90%, the highest of all seven regions (OECD 2016). According to the OECD (2010), out of a global working

population of 3 billion, nearly two-thirds (1.8 billion workers) are considered to be informally employed.

Long perceived as a developing country phenomenon, informal employment is now part of labor markets in all countries and cities. Take the following examples. In Buenos Aires, a Deli pays its linemen a per diem salary in cash. A Colombian woman sells tamales in the streets of New York. A nurse from the Czech Republic takes a three-month assignment in Germany to take care of the elderly. In Brazil, a gardener works in a gated community while living in the favela next door. And in Manila, an Uber driver rushes all day to pick up his clients. These kinds of transactions are part of our everyday life in urban spaces. Even though informal employment continues to be highest in low-income countries, yet one also sees migratory and demographic shifts in countries such as France and Germany, where a re-thinking is now required on labor laws, job benefits and safety nets to ensure that the share of workers in the informal sector do not make up a greater part of the labor market.

It cannot be emphasised enough that the informal sector fulfills critical social and economic functions. For countries where estimates are available, informal economy generates over a quarter of the GDP (WIEGO 2015). Incomes generated from informal employment can also have poverty reducing effects through increasing food security. Crush and Frayne (2011) find that in Sub-Saharan Africa, around 70% of the households buy food from informal markets. According to Rogan and Cichello (2017) even in countries where informal employment accounts for a relatively small share of employment, such as South Africa, it has a significant impact on poverty reduction.

The question that needs to be asked then is why should there be a focus on reducing informality if it offers possibilities and opportunities, and serves as a crucial cushion where state support systems are non-existent? The answer is simple - due to the absence of regulations such as safety laws, minimum wage requirements and basic service standards, informal workers face a series of challenges including long working hours, low pay, job insecurity, difficult working conditions and low job satisfaction, among others. Women employed in the informal sector are particularly vulnerable, as they are often concentrated in low-wage, low-skilled and home-based jobs, and face thus a unique set of barriers in accessing health and other services (UNFPA, 2014b). Similarly, migrants, disabled people, and children suffer disproportionately as part of the informal sector.

Two primary conclusions can be drawn from this discussion. First, urban areas are places of economic and social opportunity, including higher incomes, more jobs, upward mobility, and higher quality of life. Yet, these prospects diminish in overcrowded economies where the workforce is devoid of a social security system and is vulnerable to the volatility of national and global economic forces. In the absence of redistributive policies, strong labor market institutions, and opportunities for collective bargaining, economic growth leads to stagnating wages for the working class and creates new forms of structural intra-urban inequalities. This brings us to the second conclusion - that the problem is not informality itself, but the response that it has been given thus far.

As such, the language used to describe informality has shifted significantly over the last two decades, from being perceived as a “problem that requires eradication,” to more recent conversations about recognizing the contribution of informal workers to wider organisation and functioning of urban areas. Multilateral organisations like the UN are also taking note, as is reflected in discussions of international agreements including the SDGs and the NUA. In fact, addressing informality is now a critical component in the completion of at least four of the 17 SDGs: Goal 1 on reducing income poverty, Goal 5 on gender equality, Goal 8 on inclusive sustainable economic growth and decent and productive employment, and Goal 11 on inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities. Also in the NUA, countries have committed to recognizing the contribution of the informal economy, by supporting informal enterprises (clause 18), improving the livelihoods of the working poor in the informal economy (clause 59), engaging in progressive formalization of the informal economy (also clause 59), and regulating access to public spaces and streets by street vendors and local markets for commercial purposes (clause 100). More decisively, it is at the city level that (almost) all SDGs connect. It is for this reason that “...stakes in the debates about the future of cities are global stakes. They are at once political and economic, determining the future of the planet and the possibility of social justice and sustainability in the future” (Cohen 2012).

Although the new urban commitments are certainly a step in the right direction, the global community will have to ensure its implementation. The following section discusses the fulfillment of the commitments made just about two decades ago, as part of the 1996 Habitat Agenda, in regards to informality and vulnerable employment.

### 3. The State of Urban Informality: The Habitat Commitment Index

In 1996, at the second UN conference on Housing and Urban development (Habitat II), the signatory nations committed to:

- strengthen the linkages between the informal and formal sectors, Clause 118 (i)
- promote access to credit and innovative banking alternatives with flexible guarantees and collateral requirements for women and people living in poverty, including those who work in the informal sector, family enterprises and small scale enterprises, Clause 118 (g)
- to foster economic policies that have a positive impact on the employment and income of women workers in both the formal and informal sectors, Clause 119 (f)
- assist informal sector enterprises to become more productive and progressively integrated into the formal economy, Clause 159 (f)
- integrate, where appropriate, the needs of the growing informal sector within planning, design and management systems by, inter alia, promoting its participation in the planning and decision making process, Clause 160 (d)

There were at least 15 more such commitments within the Habitat Agenda. However, it would not be an exaggeration to say that despite these commitments, very little advanced in transitioning workers from the informal sector to the formal. As discussed in the labor reports by WIEGO in 2016 and the International Labor Organisation in 2017, the majority of workers across the globe continue to be employed in the informal economy.

In an attempt to assess if and how the countries fulfilled the commitments outlined in the Habitat Agenda, the Global Urban Futures Project at the New School created the Habitat Commitment Index (HCI). This was in preparation for the UN Habitat III Summit in October 2016. The idea being that a new urban agenda should be based on an analysis of what has worked and what has not, and previous mistakes not repeated.

#### Methodology

The HCI comprises 15 indicators and six dimensions, namely, infrastructure, poverty, environment, gender, institutional capacity, and employment. Two of the indicators



in the employment dimension are particularly relevant for this discussion, including a) informal employment and b) precarious work.

Instead of assessing absolute performance and ranking countries on how they perform on these indicators, the HCI compares countries at similar resource levels, thus taking economic possibilities into consideration. The rationale of this methodology is that it makes little sense to compare countries at vastly different resource levels. An example would be comparing Sweden and Togo on their provision of sanitation services, even though in 2016, Sweden's GDP per capita was 44,004 USD, which was about 30 times that of Togo's GDP of 1,363 USD. Instead, the HCI compares the achievements of countries with similar GDP levels. For example, in 2016, Belize and Guatemala had similar GDP per capita of about 7,000 USD, but different HCI scores of 75.5 and 64.8 respectively.

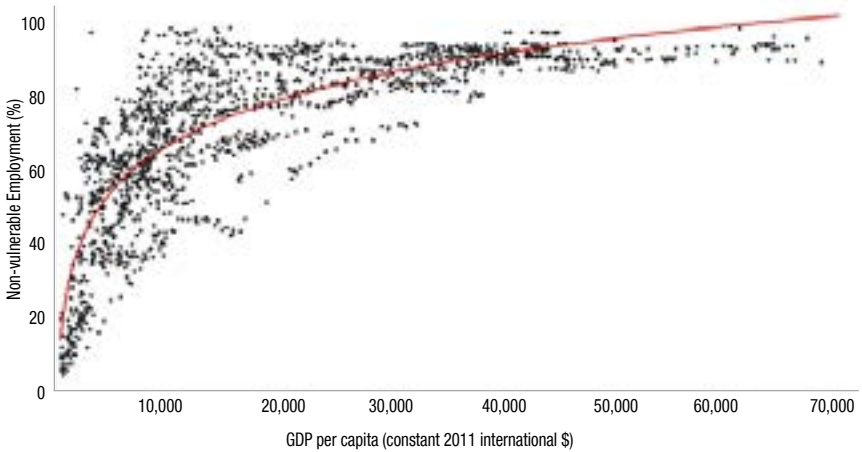
## **Findings**

According to Duarte (2014), the empirical evidence on the linkage of informal economy and GDP is ambiguous and depends on the methodology used to estimate the size of the informal economy. Findings based on the HCI however suggest that as a country's GDP per capita increases, the percentage of population working in the informal sector declines. This relationship appears to be even more direct with precarious work. Countries with higher GDP per capita levels tend to have lower levels of precarious work.

The graph below depicts this relationship by taking the inverse of vulnerable or precarious employment, so to speak “non-vulnerable employment,” or, as is referred to here as decent work.

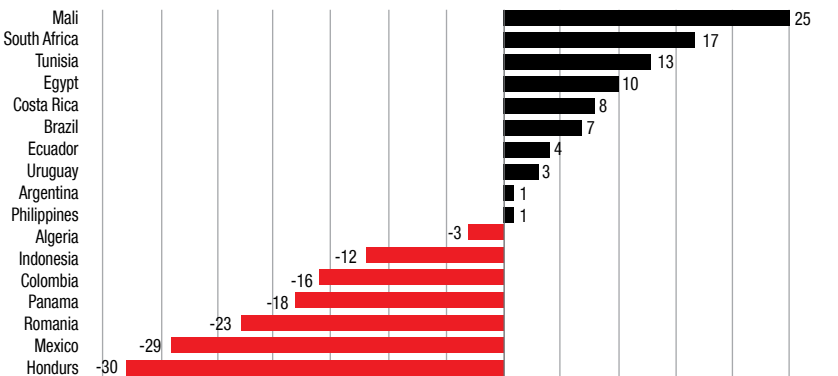
One of the big challenges of this study was the availability of data, especially on the employment dimension. Of the 169 countries covered in the HCI sample, only 16 had collected and published data on informal employment over time, and in a manner that allowed for comparative analysis. The regional distribution of data reporting was particularly interesting. Of the 16 countries that reported historical data, eight are in Latin America, four in the Middle East and Northern Africa, two in Sub-Saharan Africa, and two in Southeast Asia. Notably, data on informal employment is unavailable for Europe, North America, and Central Asia. However, data on vulnerable employment, the second indicator in the employment dimension, is available for 94 countries, that is, 56 % of all countries included in the HCI sample.

**Figure 2:** The relationship between Decent Work and GDP per capita. Using an inverse of vulnerable employment indicator collected by the World Bank, the HCI creates a score based on the maximum level achieved by a country of a similar income level. This chart shows that countries with higher GDP per capita have a smaller share of their population working in vulnerable or precarious conditions



(Source: World Bank - World Development Indicators)

**Figure 3:** HCI on Informal Employment (1996 - 2016). Out of 169 countries in the HCI sample, only 16 countries reported data on informal employment over time in a manner that allowed for comparisons



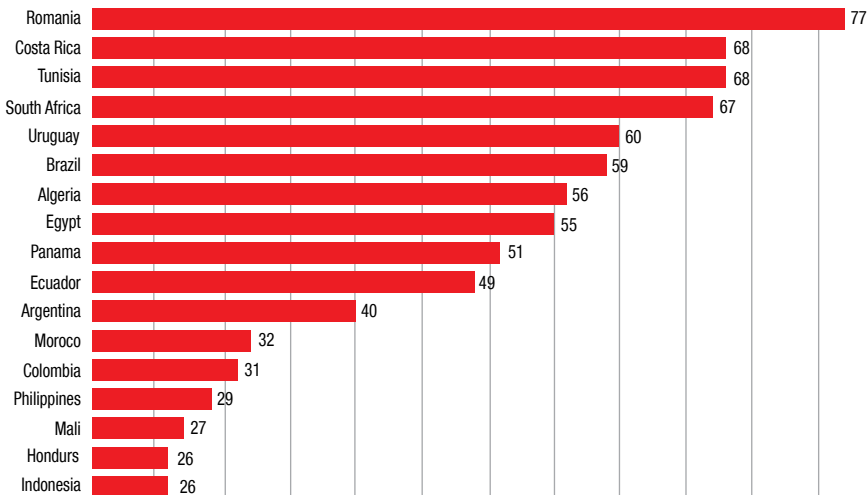
(Source: Habitat Commitment Index, Global Urban Futures Project)

The HCI also compared levels of informality and vulnerable employment in 2016 with these levels in 1996. Figure 3 is an analysis of score change for the 16 countries that reported informal employment data. The countries with the largest improvements since 1996 are Mali, South Africa and Tunisia, with an increase of 25, 17 and 13 points respectively. While the three worst performers over this period are Romania, Morocco and Honduras, reporting a decline between 23 and 33 HCI points.

Despite the significant drop in Romania's performance over time, it still reported the highest overall score for the indicator. Costa Rica, Tunisia, and South Africa also had very high levels of 67 and 68 HCI points. In contrast to Romania, Mali improved more than any other country under investigation, but ranked among the worst performers in 2016, along with Indonesia.

These findings correspond to estimates by the ILO and WIEGO (2013), which suggest that in Mali, informal employment constitutes about 82% of non-agricultural employment. In South Africa estimates are significantly lower, with about 33%. In South and East Asia, excluding China, informal employment constitutes about 60% of non-agricultural employment, with lower levels in Thailand (~40%), and much higher levels in India (~84%). As far as gender distribution is concerned, in South Asia the

**Figure 3: Scores for the indicator on informal employment. Romania shows the highest score, while Mali, Honduras and Indonesia lag behind**



(Source: Habitat Commitment Index, Global Urban Futures Project).

ratio of women to men is 83 to 82, which is less drastic as compared to Latin America (54 to 48) or Sub-Saharan Africa (74 to 61). In Abidjan, for example, 90 % of women have informal jobs compared to 70% of men (Vanek et al. 2014).

In terms of improvements in vulnerable employment, it is notable that the three best performers over time are countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, namely Senegal, Rwanda, and Tanzania. Countries from East Asia, including Indonesia, Cambodia, and Vietnam are also among the countries that achieved significant improvements in reducing vulnerable working conditions. Among European countries, Croatia, Hungary and Greece made the highest improvements since 1996. In Latin America and the Caribbean, Brazil made much faster improvement than other countries. The poorest performers over time include Cameroon, Colombia, and Nicaragua.

**Figure 5: Vulnerable employment over time. Selected countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America made big improvements in their vulnerable employment scores between 1996 and 2015. Countries shaded in red had declining HCI scores between 1996 and 2016, while those in green showed an improvement. The darker the color shading, the stronger the change. Countries in grey did not publish internationally comparable data. To view any country's ranking in the vulnerable employment indicator, (see <https://www.globalurbanfutures.org/carto-interactive-map>)**

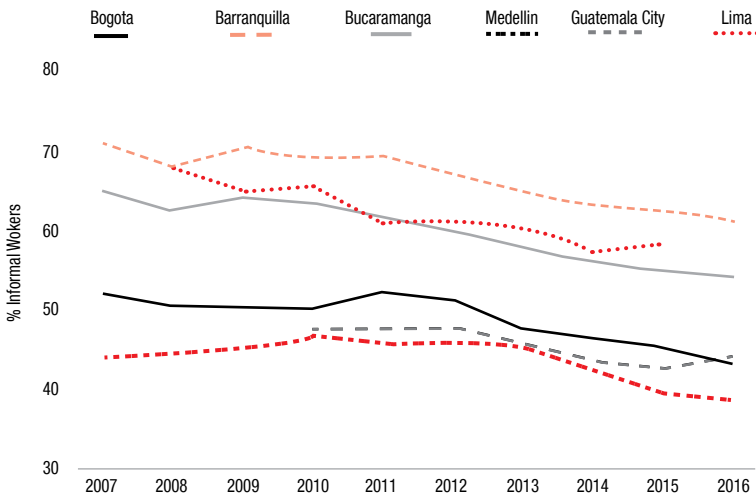


(Source: Habitat Commitment Index, Global UrbanFutures Project)

The HCI findings provide interesting insights into national urban development scenarios. This is especially relevant as international commitments are typically made at the country level. However, urban averages do not show the stark differences in performance across cities within the same country. In order to plug this analytical gap, the HCI incorporated city level analyses, following the Habitat III conference in Quito. This is an important development in relation to the implementation of the NUA, as case studies of successful, or failed, urban policies and practices can guide future planning and implementation.

The case of six Latin American cities demonstrates this particularly well. As is depicted in Figure 6, in the cities of Barranquilla, Bogota, Bucaramanga, Guatemala City, Lima, and Medellin, informality as a percentage of the total labor force declined between 2007 and 2016. The graph highlights the stark differences between cities, with some reducing informality at a much faster pace than others. Within just nine years, Barranquilla and Lima reduced informality by ten percentage points from 70% to 60%, and from 67% to 57%, respectively. On an average, non agricultural informal employment in Colombia declined from 58% in 2009 to 55% in 2013. The favorable economic cycle accompanied by job creation contributed to this decrease, as did institutional factors such as labor formalization agreements, the Plan of Action for Labor Rights and programs such as “Colombia becomes formal” (ILO 2015).

**Figure 6: A timeline of informal employment figures using city-level data**



(Source: Monitoring and Assessing Progress at the City Level, Global Urban Futures Project)

Medellin's performance is particularly noteworthy. With 38% of its residents working in the informal market, the city has the lowest informality levels in the country (and of all cities included in this sample). It can be assumed that its innovative public interventions and social policies contribute to a decline in informality from 44% in 2007.

As national and local governments are identifying ways to implement the 2030 Agenda, lessons can be learned from successful and failed practices. Why does Barranquilla have the highest informality rates in Colombia, and what was the context of Medellin's success? How can linkages between the informal and the formal be made stronger and sustained throughout times of political change? And how are cities planning for the future of employment, which might see new forms of formal and informal jobs? Answers to such questions can necessarily guide urban policy interventions in order to meet international commitments.

## **4. From Jeepneys to Uber: Outtakes of Informality and the Gig economy**

During the deliberations on New Urban Agenda, stakeholders and member states addressed aspects of the informal economy that were not covered in the 1996 Habitat Agenda. Arguably, their attempts were limited to more traditional forms of informal employment, which represents a small slice of the job market. They failed to recognize the technological advancements since 1996 that have conjured new types of work arrangements.

This shift in informal work is illustrated by our discussion of informal transport workers in Philippines.

Jeepneys are a form of urban transport in Philippines, which have served as lifeline of working class Filipinos for decades. Not only do Jeepneys provide an affordable means of transportation, especially for those living outside metropolitan areas, but also these have been the main source of income for over three million Filipino drivers and conductors (Philippine Statistics Authority 2013).

While the country has experience rapid economic growth in the last decade, this has also meant an increase in the urban population and an exploding traffic congestion crisis. These problems effectively shortchanged jeepney drivers and conductors who



(L-R) The Jeepney Modernization Program announced by the Philippine Department of Transportation in Oct 2017 is not the only challenge that will put drivers and conductors to the test. (Source: Flickr User theswallow1965, Flickr User Lava)

are no longer able to make the same earnings. Therefore, many have switched over to ‘modern’ occupations, such as driving Uber cars.

Uber, arguably a giant in the rideshare world, has made its presence felt across developed and less developed cities. Places like New York City and Nairobi have welcomed this new mobility service to compliment their already existing transit systems while cities like London, Buenos Aires, and Manila have taken a strong stand against the corporation in defense of local industry. In August 2017, Uber settled a \$10 million bill to lift its one-month suspension in the Philippines.

The following story of a man named Junior represents a growing trend in the country of Jeepney drivers shifting to Uber. For 15 years, Junior worked as a Jeepney driver and then joined the Uber service, when a generous cousin working overseas offered to make a down payment for a car. In his words:

*I started driving Jeepney when my wife was expecting her second child and I needed a stable income. But now, my kids are older and all want to go to college. Jeepney fares have not increased and I was barely making enough money to feed us for a week. Even if I did extra hours, I was not making much, what with all the congestion in the city. I was in a bad place, really... My cousin convinced me that I could have it easier if I joined Uber. At first, I had no idea what Uber or ridesharing was but it seemed to be my only alternative.*

All over the world, the consumer demand for ridesharing services like Uber has been fuelled by low price, and has grown despite some efforts by public and traditional taxi industry to discourage its use. In New York City for example, the #deleteUber movement in the early part of 2017 quickly ran out of steam.

However, while Uber has affected traditional forms of transport, but it has not brought any significant change in the working conditions for those employed with it. At first glance, many of the drivers with their loaned air-conditioned vehicles do not appear to share the same fate as other forms of informal labor. Yet, they share much in common, often driving without health insurance, without a secure pension upon retirement, or a guaranteed minimum wage at the end of the day.

Unlike the case of Uber drivers in Manila, who use these services as a primary source of income, in cities like New York, thousands of drivers work elsewhere during the day and drive an Uber at night, just in order to get an extra income. As a driver recounts: “Being stuck in a car for eight hours a day is not fun but it is the only way I can pay off this car. I also have three kids to feed and send to school. I don’t care if I’m exhausted, I try to drive at least 2-3 times a week.”

But Uber’s story is just the tip of the iceberg on a subject that is undoubtedly a grey area in multilateral discussions about the informal sector: the gig economy. The gig economy does not have an official definition. A ‘gig’ could be defined as a single project or task for which a worker is hired. Governments and corporations are not shy of admitting their difficulty in tracking the number of citizens participating in this economy. Responses to the concept vary from celebratory to critical. What we argue for however is the need for greater attention to the digital labor market as an emerging form of informality in our cities. An acknowledgment of this issue is the important step towards creating a call for action and uniting a deeply fragmented global working class.



(L-R) Manifestation and strike against the legalization of Uber in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2016; Protest of taxis and public transport workers against Uber in Bogota, 2017 (Sources: Left: Change.org; Right: Caracol)



## 5. Conclusion

In 2016, 20 years after the 1996 Habitat Agenda was signed, more than half of the world's population was living in cities, partaking or hoping to partake in opportunities improve their life. As has been argued, agglomeration economies that lead to efficiency gains and economies of scale, positively affect the absorptive capacity of cities, resulting in higher incomes and quality of life of urban workers. Today, in almost all countries, urban-based economic activities generate more than half of a country's GDP (Cohen 2016).

However, urbanisation is not equivalent to agglomeration. Without strong local institutions, access to basic services, and a set of inclusive regulations, cities run the risk of turning into places of poverty rather than opportunity. Local governments are increasingly unable to satisfy the scale and composition of demands coming from urban civil society, including for services and infrastructure. For a long time, this void has been filled by civil society organisations, such as the Slum Development Initiative in India, or Gawad Kalinga in the Philippines (see Roy 2005), or by city residents themselves. Instead of waiting for social insurance or unemployment benefits, that may never arrive, people have taken upon themselves to create their own opportunities.

It is crucial to consider this relationship between the state and informal employment, when envisioning the future challenges on informality. This is particularly timely as countries and cities are identifying ways to implement the 2030 Agenda, which calls for stronger linkages between the formal and informal sectors, reduction of income poverty, inclusive economic growth and gender equality. It is also timely because a new kind of informal worker has entered the global arena, but who is often left out of international discussions, agendas and treaties. As has been discussed in this paper, large tech companies such as Uber create employment opportunities that are low-risk, flexible and easy to access with seemingly great financial returns. However, the drivers or the foot soldiers of the tech industry's expanding reach are at the short end of these arrangements, without proper acknowledgment from the government, or access to existing labor regulations and labor market institutions. This translates into a further weakening of the power of labor versus large business platforms.

The trend of an increasing concentration of market power, capital and wealth should also be considered in understanding why the economic growth of the past decade has not led to improvements in urban well-being. The Habitat Commitment

Index assessed this link between economic growth and urban development in light of the commitments made in the 1996 Agenda. It gave us two important lessons for future debates on urban economy. First, economic growth alone does not generate improved urban well-being. It requires careful planning and a set of policies to ensure that growth is shared and leaves no one behind. This is confirmed by the second lesson, that countries at similar GDP per capita levels often have vastly different levels of urban performance, as demonstrated by the case of El Salvador and Morocco.

Urbanisation is only expected to increase in the next two decades, and it is clear that the policies addressing urban economy and urban labor will determine whether or not urbanisation yields the expected benefits of agglomeration. In order for cities to become places of opportunity in the future, local and national governments will have to recognize that technological advancements are no replacement for a well-oiled social security system and key regulations affecting jobs and wages. Instead of seeing technology as a profit generating machine, we need to rethink how we use these emerging technologies and make them inclusive and beneficial to the common good. It is time we start turning our commitments into concrete actions.

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## Chapter 4

# URBAN LIVELIHOODS: REVIEWING THE EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF THE NEW URBAN AGENDA<sup>1</sup>

*Martha A Chen, Sally Roever and Caroline Skinner*

### 1. Introduction

The New Urban Agenda, the 20-year strategy on sustainable urbanization, was formally adopted by over 160 countries at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in October 2016. The final document explicitly recognizes “the contribution of the working poor in the informal economy”. It advocates “people-centred” urban governance that empowers and includes stakeholders. This marks a significant global shift in thinking. Civil society actors, notably organisations of informal workers, have played an important role in securing this commitment.

Attention now turns to national and city-level implementation. This paper is a contribution to bolster these efforts. Much of the material draws on the work of the global research–action– policy network WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organising). WIEGO was founded in 1997 to improve the situation of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy through stronger organisations and networks of informal workers, improved statistics and research on informal employment, and more inclusive and equitable policies and practices towards informal workers and their livelihood activities.

Since WIEGO’s founding, interest in – and research on – informal employment has grown considerably. WIEGO’s specific contribution has been to put statistics and

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1. This was originally published as Chen, Roever and Skinner (2016), “Urban livelihoods: reviewing the evidence in support of the New Urban Agenda?”, Environment and Urbanization Brief 34, available at [http://pubs.iied.org/search/?s=EUB<https://protect-za.mimecast.com/s/o\\_y4C8qz5ESYwqm4F6G\\_qp>](http://pubs.iied.org/search/?s=EUB<https://protect-za.mimecast.com/s/o_y4C8qz5ESYwqm4F6G_qp>). The Brief was funded by UK aid from DFID.

research into the hands of informal workers and their organisations to bridge ground realities and mainstream policy debates; and to bring the voices of workers and their organisations to policy debates. Drawing on WIEGO's data, this paper presents statistics, survey findings and case study evidence, which demonstrate that including the informal economy in urban policy and practice is both necessary and possible.

## **2. The Size, Composition and Contribution of the (Urban) Informal Economy**

Most people now live in urban areas. The United Nations projects that by 2050, 66 per cent of the world's population will be urban, suggesting that urbanization will continue unabated (UNDESA 2015). Despite predictions to the contrary, urbanization in many countries has not been driven or accompanied by industrialization. Indeed, in some countries, cities are de-industrializing. The net result is that most urban workers in low-income countries earn their livelihoods in the informal economy. The prevalence of informal employment, much of which takes place in public space and informal settlements, is a critical issue for the urban development agenda.

Official labour force statistics show that informal employment<sup>2</sup> comprises more than half of non-agricultural employment<sup>3</sup> in most regions of the global South – specifically, 82 per cent in South Asia, 66 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, 65 per cent in East and Southeast Asia, and 51 per cent in Latin America. In the Middle East and North Africa, informal employment is 45 per cent of non-agricultural employment. Estimates for six cities in China show that 33 per cent of non-agricultural employment is informal. These figures also indicate that informal employment is a disproportionate source of employment for women in most regions.

The statistics also show the prevalence of self-employment relative to wage employment.

In all five regions with data plus urban China, self-employment outweighs wage employment as a source of non-agricultural informal employment. Across the regions

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2. These statistics are based on international statistical norms, according to which the “informal sector” refers to employment and production that takes place in unincorporated, unregistered or small enterprises, while “informal employment” refers to employment without social protection through work both inside and outside the informal sector. The “informal economy” refers to all units, activities and workers so defined, and the output from them.
  3. Due to differences in the way countries define urban, non-agricultural employment is used as a proxy for urban employment.

**Table 4.1: Specific groups of urban informal workers from selective countries**

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| <p><b>Domestic work is an important occupation, involving a sizeable proportion of the urban workforce.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>urban employment</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Africa: 3 to 9% in 7 West African cities and 1 East African city</li> <li>■ India: 4 %</li> <li>■ Latin America: 6% in Lima, 8% in Buenos Aires, and 5.5%, on average, for the region as a whole</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <i>urban informal employment</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ South Africa: 23%</li> <li>■ Brazil: 9%</li> <li>■ India: 5%</li> <li>■ Buenos Aires: 16%</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <i>urban employees/wage workers</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Buenos Aires: 10%</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Home-based work, which cuts across different branches of industry, is an important category, representing a significant share of urban employment in some countries</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ urban employment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ India: 18%</li> <li>■ Buenos Aires: 3%</li> <li>■ South Africa: 6%</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ urban informal employment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Africa: 11-25% in 8 cities, 21% in Ghana</li> <li>■ India: 23%</li> <li>■ Latin America: 3% in Lima, 5% in Buenos Aires</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Street vendors constitute an important share of urban employment in Africa, including South Africa, but less so in Latin America, India, and Vietnam</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>urban employment</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ India: 11%</li> <li>■ Latin America: 3% in Brazil, 1% in Buenos Aires</li> <li>■ South Africa: 15%</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <i>urban informal employment</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Africa: 12-24% in 8 African cities, 14% in Ghana</li> <li>■ India: 14 %</li> <li>■ Vietnam: 11% each in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City</li> <li>■ Latin America: 2 % in Buenos Aires, 9 % in Lima</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <i>urban self-employed</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Buenos Aires: 4%</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Where waste pickers were identified, they represented less than one per cent of the urban workforce.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>urban employment</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Africa: 0.1-0.4% in 7 West African cities</li> <li>■ South Africa: 0.7% (both formal and informal waste pickers)</li> <li>■ India: 0.1%</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <i>urban informal employment</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ India: 0.1%</li> <li>■ Latin America: 0.6% in Lima, 0.5% in Brazil</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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(Source: Vanek et al. 2013)

own account workers (one-person operations) are the largest category of the self-employed. The second largest category is contributing family workers. Employers are often the focus of policy support. However, the statistics show that very few informal workers are employers. In sum, the present-day reality is that most non-agricultural jobs in the global South are informal, and most of those are in self-employment.

Within informal employment, there is considerable diversity in terms of occupational groups and activities. The urban informal workforce is comprised primarily of construction workers, domestic workers, home-based producers, street vendors, transport workers and waste pickers, plus many low-end service occupations (See below Table 1 on specific group of urban informal workers from selective countries). These activities take place in a diversity of workplaces well beyond private commercial spaces. Particularly relevant is that homes often double as workplaces, and public space is an important place of work for the urban working poor (See Chen and Sinha 2016). Urban policymakers and practitioners, in other words, can no longer assume that people strictly live in private residential space and work in private commercial space.

Although the earnings of informal workers are low on average, cumulatively their activities contribute substantially to the economy. For example, in the West African countries for which there are data, the informal sector contributes over 50 per cent to non-agricultural gross value added, while in India the informal sector contributes 46 per cent (ILO 2013). This suggests that the informal economy should not be considered marginal to the economy; rather, it should feature centrally in local economic development strategies.

### **3. Conceptual Frameworks I: Development Studies**

The urban informal economy has been a field of enquiry for over four decades. Keith Hart's seminal analysis first countered the commonly held view that "traditional" activities would disappear by being absorbed into the modern capitalist economy with industrialization (Hart 1973). He argued that informal activities possessed some autonomous capacity for generating growth in the incomes of the urban poor. Since Hart's study sparked research and policy attention on the informal economy, the concept has been hotly debated. These debates however focus less on the informal

economy's potential and contributions, and more on what causes it and the problems and challenges associated with it.

Chen categorizes the academic and policy debates on the informal economy since Hart's study into four schools of thought (Chen 2012). The Dualist school, first promoted by the International Labour Organisation, sees the informal sector as comprising marginal activities – distinct from and not related to the formal sector – that provide income for the poor and a safety net in times of crisis. The Structuralist school, a critique from the left, views the informal economy as consisting of subordinated economic units and workers that serve to reduce input and labour costs, and thereby increase the competitiveness of large capitalist firms (Moser 1978; Portes, Castells and Benton 1989). The Legalist school, championed by de Soto, sees the informal sector as comprised of “plucky” microentrepreneurs who choose to operate informally in order to avoid the costs, time and effort of formal registration, and who need property rights to convert their assets into legally recognized assets (de Soto 1989). The Voluntarist school, a variant on the legalist school, holds that the informal economy is comprised of (mainly) self-employed entrepreneurs who volunteer to work informally, not due to cumbersome regulations but as a strategic choice (Maloney 2004).

Most causal theories are valid, but only for certain segments of informal employment; and no single causal theory can explain all segments of informal employment. Researchers, policymakers and practitioners thus should be acutely aware of which segment of the informal economy they are focusing on. Further, the four dominant explanations – exit from, exclusion from, entry barriers to formal regulations, and subordination to or exploitation by formal firms – are not sufficient. Systemic drivers also shape the ways in which people develop livelihoods and the extent to which those livelihoods are linked to formal and informal enterprises and institutions. WIEGO's 10-city Informal Economy Monitoring Study (IEMS) has found that macroeconomic trends, government practices and the legal regulatory environment, and value chain dynamics have major impacts on informal livelihoods (Chen 2014; Dias and Samson 2016). In today's global economy, trends in trade and technology have led to reductions in the employment intensity of growth. Fewer formal jobs are being created and more production is being outsourced through value chains, leading to changes in the nature of work and the structure of labour markets as well as an increase in informal employment (Kanbur 2014).



The mainstream development literature tends to pay little or no attention to the impact of policies and practices of urban practitioners and local government on informality. The article by Chen (2016) in the October issue explores the ways in which urban governance affects technology choices among informal workers in three cities, while Alferts, Dobson and Xulu (2016) show how local government in Durban, South Africa impacts the occupational health and safety of informal workers whose workplace is urban public space. Thara's contribution shows how interactions between representative associations and local government elites in Mangaluru, India shape livelihood opportunities in important ways (Thara 2016). And Banks' article calls attention to the role of police harassment in the "multiple vulnerabilities" associated with livelihood insecurity among young people in Arusha, Tanzania (Banks 2016).

## **4. Conceptual Frameworks II: Urban Studies**

There is also growing interest among urban planners, designers, architects and scholars in various aspects of urban informality. In the urban disciplines, informality was once associated with squatter settlements, but as Roy (2005) argues, it is increasingly recognized as a more generalized mode of metropolitan urbanization, with many components. The term "informality" is commonly used to describe a range of behaviours and practices that are not regulated or controlled by the state or formal institutions, including those related to income generation, service provision, and settlements. The term "informal planning" is also used to refer to unofficial planning processes by the state that happen outside regulatory procedures, notably quasi-legal land transfers (Duminy 2011).

Such analysis exposes two underlying structural tensions. First, Watson (2009a) identifies a tension that she calls "the 'clash of rationalities' between techno-managerial and market-driven systems of urban governance, services and planning and the marginalized urban populations surviving largely under conditions of informality". In some cities, the tension manifests itself when municipal governments abandon comprehensive planning and increasingly resort to ad-hoc "sanitizing" measures of various kinds (Kamete and Lindell 2010). Whether planned or ad-hoc, the state seeks to sweep away informality. Many make the case for refocusing urban planning on poverty, inequality, informality, and spatial fragmentation by adding a perspective from the global South (Watson 2009b).

The second structural tension exposed by urban specialists is between two modes of informality within cities: informality created from below and informality created from above. In her analysis of land markets and settlements in Indian cities, Roy (2005) distinguishes between informal settlements created by the urban poor (“subaltern informality”) and informal settlements created by the state in collusion with rich residents, housing authorities and private real estate developers (“elite informality”).

In analysing this second structural tension, urban specialists describe how the urban poor create informal settlements or pursue informal livelihoods by operating in the gaps in formal rules (de jure and/or de facto) and the gaps in the use of urban space (temporal and/or spatial). Meanwhile, the state both defines the formal rules (who and what is considered legal/illegal or formal/informal) and creates authorized exceptions to them, including the use of public space, often in collusion with powerful vested interests. Put another way, there are exceptions authorized by the state that the elite take advantage of, and unauthorized exceptions that the non-elite create on their own for survival.

### **Informality from below: operating in the gaps**

Informality from below is associated with the strategies of the urban poor. The urban poor create informal settlements by occupying private land or public space at a point in time, or incrementally over time, with the hope of permanent occupation. And they pursue their livelihoods by appropriating available space and resources, often daily.

Consider street vending, the most visible of urban informal livelihoods. Street vendors appropriate available space in areas with heavy pedestrian flows, usually in central business districts or near transport nodes. They often do so intermittently – at times in the day, week or month – when the space becomes available or when the pedestrian flows are at their peak. Over time, incrementally, some areas occupied by street vendors develop into permanent open air markets. These traditional street markets create “a unique common good, the establishment of a market environment” (Mooshammer 2015).

### **Informality from above: making rules and exceptions**

While informality from below is associated with the urban poor, informality from above is associated with the state: specifically, the ways in which local governments

set the rules of the game but also promote deregulation or legal ambiguity and make exceptions to their own rules.

City governments are thus involved in destroying informal livelihoods by defining what activities are legal/formal and illegal/informal, and criminalizing those activities they deem to be illegal/informal. By designating informal activities and the urban spaces they occupy as “pathologies”, observes Kamete (2012), the state justifies corrective measures to “normalize” urban spaces and, in so doing, to exclude and marginalize informal activities. Rao and Diwadkar (2015) explain that, to do so, city governments portray informal activities from below “as disorderly, chaotic, anarchic, unruly and ungovernable”, noting that city governments are applying this representation to “an ever-expanding and shifting universe of practices” (ibid, page 166). They conclude that marking processes or activities as “informal” allows the state to eliminate them through displacement or criminalization (ibid, page 172).

In sum, the urbanists politicize the discourse on informality – a contribution that is often missing in the development economics literature.

## **Clash of informalities**

Access to and use of public space, public services and public procurement represent domains where informality from above and from below are contested, often to the disadvantage of the urban poor. Street vendors are an iconic example of such contestation. Recent case studies of policy responses to street vending and street vendors’ responses to policy changes illustrate the complex political dynamics when city governments decide to restrict the use of public space in central business districts by street vendors, who they associate with crime and grime. Membership-based organisations (MBOs) of street vendors in the WIEGO network have faced relocations with mixed consequences; for example, the 2013 relocation of the wholesale market in Lima, Peru benefited market traders and porters with better working conditions, but left street vendors without the economic linkages upon which they had depended for decades.

To address such clashes, workers’ organisations in the WIEGO network have developed methodologies for engaging with local governments to address their needs for access to public space, public services and public procurement processes (Roever and Skinner 2016). One such methodology is the development of multi-stakeholder platforms that bridge the interests of multiple organisations within a

single occupational sector, of multiple organisations across occupational sectors, and of multiple organisations plus government and non-government stakeholders. For instance, several organisations in Lima, Peru formed a Self-Employed Workers' Platform to aggregate their proposals for social dialogue, finance, training, social protection and enterprise management to present to municipal governments.<sup>4</sup> A second methodology involves sustained policy dialogues, as in the case of HomeNet Thailand, which has used this method to advocate for better public services, including water, health care and transportation (See Chen and Sinha 2016; Tangworamongkon 2015).

## 5. New Policy Directions

While the urban planning literature has usefully re-politicized informality by asking fundamental questions about how practices are identified as informal, its broad pessimism around the possibilities of more inclusive practices stands in contrast to the efforts of workers' organisations to advocate around specific demands at both local and global levels. These efforts often fall into one of three categories that together represent an emerging framework for policy and practice related to urban informal work.

First, many organisations are engaged in efforts to “reduce the negatives”. For instance, while conventional approaches to enterprise growth emphasize the productivity and size of enterprises, MBOs are engaged in efforts to make visible the risks and costs associated with working in public space, such as policy uncertainty, harassment and evictions by local authorities, and occupational health and safety risks, to create a more stable and predictable work environment. This is a critical area for policy reform given that informal workers lack basic social and legal protections unless they make efforts to claim these.

Second, MBOs are also engaged in efforts to “increase the positives”. These tend to focus on establishing their legal identity as workers and pushing for regulatory reforms that recognize, validate and support their work, rather than problematize their informal status. These efforts take place at local and global levels. Locally, street vendors and waste pickers have engaged in legal struggles to establish their right to work – for example, street traders in South Africa and India (Roever and Skinner

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4. See <http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/resources/files/Plataforma-Lima-Peru-2014.pdf>.

2016; Roever 2016) and waste pickers in Belo Horizonte, Bogotá and Pune (Dias 2016; Chikarmane 2012). Notably, these efforts aim to reduce the degree of informality under which these workers operate; in other words, they are in effect bottom-up efforts at formalization. Globally, informal economy worker-based movements and their allies have advocated successfully for new International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions (WIEGO 2016) and were very active in the processes that resulted in the NUA, agreed at Habitat III.

A key area of positive intervention is access to infrastructure and basic services for informal workers at their workplaces, whether in public space or in their homes. The IEMS results identified infrastructure deficits as a key driver of working conditions for all three occupational groups studied (See Molaney 2004; Chen 2014; Roever 2014; Dias and Samson 2016), and many MBO partners in that study have used the findings to advocate for improved access. Challenges related to infrastructure also include high costs and poor quality. These challenges are highlighted in advocacy efforts that link informal livelihoods and informal settlements, such as the joint response to the Habitat III Zero Draft presented by the Grassroots Partner Constituency of the World Urban Campaign's General Assembly of Partners.<sup>5</sup>

Third, as a key enabling condition, organisations of informal workers are making efforts to institutionalize their voice in rule setting and policymaking forums. Though collective bargaining is traditionally understood as the domain of formal sector trade unions with employers, collective bargaining by informal worker organisations, with both the state and market actors, is quite common and increasing in scale and impact (Budlender 2013). HomeNet Thailand has facilitated collective negotiations with municipal authorities by home-based workers (relocated from central Bangkok to the periphery of the city) for additional bus routes and a pedestrian over-bridge at a dangerous traffic junction. StreetNet International has taken a particular interest in working with its affiliates to establish statutory bargaining forums between street traders and local governments. Organisations of waste pickers in Brazil, Colombia and India have negotiated contracts and infrastructure (e.g. sheds and equipment) from local government (Chen et al 2013).

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5. The WIEGO network and Slum/Shack Dwellers International are the co-chairs of the Grassroots Partner Constituency.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to challenge common assumptions about the informal workforce and the state. The first such assumption is that informal workers operate outside the reach of the state because they seek to avoid regulation. The reality is more complex: informal workers are often inside the punitive arm, but outside the protective arm, of the state; and informal workers regularly engage with the state to seek protection and support. The second assumption is that employment consists mostly of wage employment in privately owned commercial spaces. In cities across the world, households are the major site of production and public space is the major site of exchange. Yet city governments and urban planners do not recognize homes as workplaces, or “slums” and squatter settlements as hubs of production; nor do they recognize street vendors for their contribution to exchange and trade in the city. Most importantly, the three policy priorities identified in this paper (reducing the negatives, increasing the positives and inviting informal workers to the policy table) represent a significant innovation – a proposed shift – in the relationship between informal workers and local governments.

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## Chapter 5

# GENDER AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN INCLUSIVE CITIES

*Cathy Holt and Gloria Gallant*

### 1. Introduction

The consultative process leading up to the creation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) was extensive. However, women were often referred to as one of the many marginalised groups. In the final document, women were grouped as an indistinct category, which in many ways makes them 'disappear', since women also constitute the youth, the ageing, the disabled, the migrants and refugees, among others. Although the NUA is an action-oriented agenda that has principles of inclusivity and decentralization at its core, but localizing and realizing its vision, alongside that of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), will require the recognition and leading roles of grassroots women. This intent and intervention is at the centre of the work being undertaken by the Huairou Commission, and forms the focus of this paper.

The Huairou Commission is a platform that develops strategic partnerships and linkages among grassroots women's organisations, advancing their capacity to collectively influence political space on behalf of their communities and enhance their sustainable and resilient community development practices. Its members develop and share tools for implementation that can be adapted to local needs and customs.

During the lead up to the NUA, the Commission established consultative processes to center-stage women's issues and challenges and give stakeholders a voice in defining gender policies that recognize all facets of sustainable urban development and promote equity, welfare and shared prosperity. With this objective, it partnered with the Habitat III Secretariat to develop an Expert Group Meeting (EGM): Engendering the New urban Agenda. A meeting, convened on September 29–30, 2015

in New York City also identified policy priorities and developed relevant indicators of change. Concurrently, the Commission also advocated these issues through the Urban Thinkers Campuses (UTC), Policy Unit Working Groups, and the General Assembly Partners (GAP), including by spearheading the Women's GAP. As a result of these multi-layered consultations, some gender policies were incorporated into the NUA.

## **2. Women's Issues and the New Urban Agenda**

The NUA recognizes that the empowerment of all women and girls is needed “in order to fully harness their vital contribution to sustainable development, improve human health and well-being, as well as foster resilience and protect the environment.” The NUA also acknowledges that women need to be empowered to fully and effectively participate in leadership roles at all levels of decision-making, including governing bodies; they should receive equal pay for equal work; and should feel safe in public and private spaces through elimination of all forms of discrimination, violence, and harassment, and of harmful practices such as child or early marriage, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation.

The NUA promotes recognition of the economic contributions of the working poor in the informal economy and proposes adopting a balanced approach combining incentives and compliance measures to transition these workers into the formal economy. “Their livelihoods, working conditions and income security, legal and social protection, access to skills, assets and other support services, and voice and representation should be enhanced.” Although this recommendation does not specifically address women, statistically they comprise majority of the unpaid labour force, carrying out many informal activities and performing majority of duties in the care economies.

During the consultative process, the Commission had also identified some of the other salient to women's security and empowerment, such as land rights, and secure tenure and housing. On its part, the NUA recognized the need for plurality of tenure types, and also the development of age, gender, and environment responsive solutions within the arena of land and property rights. However, the document did not directly address the difficulties women encounter in securing access to land in rapidly urbanising areas or emphasise the need for legal frameworks that ensure women's rights over land and housing, to curtail increasing violence and conflict

related to forced evictions and displacement. The consultations also had discussion on issues that disproportionately impact women, such as access to basic services, safe affordable transportation, rural-urban linkages for food security, and problem of migration and refugees, along with equal participation of women in urban policy, and planning and budgeting and increased financial resources for women. Although some of these issues appear in the NUA, but the specific challenges faced by women across different segments, are not addressed.

### **3. Grassroots Women and Implementation of NUA**

A key priority of the Huairou Commission is empowering and promoting the voices of grassroots women, for and by grassroots women. As a global network of organised grassroots women living in urban, peri-urban and rural areas, the Commission has been promoting women's leadership for response to community challenges. In this regard, the Commission has documented and scaled-up development tools and strategies, which can be shared and adapted to grassroots community projects. Members of the Commission believe that by involving grassroots women within governance processes, their experience and expertise in community organising can be utilized to shape urban and development policy. Urban transformations must be scaled up from local communities in order for government initiatives and changes to be effective. Lasting sustainable development can only occur if those at the grassroots are engaged in realizing the goals of the NUA. As such, localizing development practices are essential to sustainable urbanization and grassroots women are uniquely positioned to lead the implementation of the NUA through their participation and leadership in community development initiatives.

The first step in this direction is community mapping. Mapping is a participatory research tool that allows grassroots groups to gather evidence and assess local community conditions. By using a structured format, members of an organisation document community risks, resources and knowledge on topics such as land use and resilience. Knowledge obtained through mapping provides data and evidence that is crucial to policy decisions regarding sustainable urban development and for reducing barriers to women in cities.

One such grassroots group spearheading mapping in an informal neighborhood is the Zambia Homeless and Poor People's Federation. Even as Zambia experiences

rapid growth, decreased government funding for city planning has resulted in a failure to address urban imbalances. This project has trained 150 women and girls in community mapping tools (GIS), who are mapping 2000 households in the informal settlements around Lusaka. The data collected thus far has been shared with local authorities through four dialogue sessions on urban planning. This data has been used in creating projects for the promotion of an inclusive approach to development planning, with outcomes that recognize poor urban neighborhoods as part and parcel of the city fabric, needing their fair share of infrastructure and basic services. The data has also revealed the need to promote access to security of tenure documentation for those living in these neighborhoods.

Grassroots women also share experiences, knowledge and lessons learned through Local 2 Local Dialogues, or Peer Learning Exchanges. These dialogues empower these women as leaders and provide opportunities for them to adapt tools and strategies for their own priorities. Through these exchanges, women see themselves not only as learners but also as experts and teachers. They are encouraged to become strong partners and assume meaningful roles in shaping local government planning and development.

In Ghana, the Grassroots Sisterhood Foundation used peer learning to promote the NUA's vision of creating food security and ensuring socio-economic activities. This project was designed to build the capacity of 3000 women farmers in about 40 communities in peri urban settlements and urban capitals of four Districts. These women were given seeds and extension services to increase the income of their small farms. Advisory services were also provided on how to manage their lands productively and keep farm records. These trainings increased their confidence and enabled them to understand and operate their businesses profitably. These projects have also enhanced the participation of women farmers in urban planning and development. Additionally, savings organisations have been established for about 84 groups, with 30 members each. As an organised group, these women are now able to negotiate more effectively with local authorities. The savings associations are also able to raise resources for organising any action or empowerment programmes. So far, the women have raised up to USD\$120,000 for various activities.

Another example is of women in the drought-ridden villages in India, who are being trained in sustainable agricultural practices in support from the Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP), a member group of the Huairou Commission. Trained women

leaders are introducing and scaling up innovative farming initiatives, and also trying to strengthen rural-urban linkages for direct sale of their products to urban markets.

Additionally, Grassroots Academies (GA) and Urban Thinkers Campuses (UTC) are also being facilitated for hands-on learning formats that help transfer successful practices and learnings from one grassroots group to another. These GAs bring together 30–100 participating women from multiple communities, organisations and countries to meet, share and exchange best practices. This process encourages women to recognise and critically analyse their own development practices, in the context of larger political and development issues. For example, in May 2017, an academy was organised in Mexico to discuss the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), the first of such events held outside Geneva. The international community reviewed global progress on the implementation of the Sendai Framework for DRR, adopted in Japan in 2015 on the creation of sustainable urban centers. Once again, the members of the Huairou Commission advocated for scaling up community led programs, already implemented by grassroots women to reduce urban disaster risks for all.

Such academies have been convened throughout Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America to discuss the implementation of NUA visions. It has brought together groups from across states, countries and regions. The process has led to strong partnerships and impacts, which can however be further strengthened by the involvement of mainstream actors such as NGOs, government, academia and private sector partners in interactive, grassroots-led analysis and problem-solving sessions.

Similar to GAs, the Urban Thinkers Campus is a platform for grassroots women to participate as learners and teachers, and share their knowledge and expertise. In partnership with its members, the Huairou Commission hosted four UTCs in 2016 in preparation for the NUA and 15 UTCs in 2017. The Campuses also provide Huairou members with an opportunity to engage with local and national governments and other relevant stakeholders over urban development issues and concerns of grassroots women. In Bangladesh, grassroots women organised an UTC with focus on the SDG11, i.e., making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable for all. It was attended by 100 grassroots women, civil society representatives, professionals and government officials.

Bangladeshi grassroots leaders have also formed watchdog groups to monitor and protect women, and to empower them to challenge cultural norms that are damaging to their welfare, on issues such as violence and disaster impacts. Watchdog

Groups, or Vigilance Committees, as they are sometimes called, emerged during HC's Women's Land Link Africa (WLLA) initiative, when Kenyan groups organised to discuss and address the issue of women being stripped of their assets and property in the event of their husbands or fathers dying from HIV-AIDS. These women are also providing leadership training to other women's groups, especially on sustainable livelihood practices like tailoring, embroidery and computer technology.

Recognizing that grassroots women will play a key role in translating the messages of the NUA into real initiatives, the Huairou Commission partnered with the Habitat III Secretariat to create the Grassroots Leaders Pilot Initiative. Thirty□ seven grassroots leaders attended the 2016 Habitat III conference in Quito through this programme. Since this was the first global conference for many of these women, they were given leadership training sessions and were assigned mentors to enhance their meeting experience. These mentors were the more experienced members of the Huairou Commission's Habitat III Delegation and were matched on the criteria of regional proximity, experience of working with grassroots leaders, and the possibilities of cross-fertilization in the region.

One of the beneficiaries of the Leadership Pilot programme, is the Asociación Garifuna Larú-Beya, which has been working in Livingston, Guatemala, on the Prevention of Violence against Women (VAW) as part of their inclusive cities initiative. They have created strategic alliances with several municipal offices and local and civil society organisations to provide training on and raise awareness of local programs to eliminate VAW. Public authorities such as the Chief of the National Civil Police of Livingston and the Tourism Police have responded favorably to their collaborative work. Similarly, in Peru, grassroots women of the Huairou Commission and GROOTS Peru partnered with key stakeholders such as local government officials, including Mayors and Lieutenant Governors, the Ministry of Women and the National Police to promote the safe and inclusive city goal of the NUA. These groups convened local workshops to inform 160 women about the goals of the NUA, trained 25 women as leaders in prevention of VAW, and prepared and submitted recommendations to local decision makers on local strategies for safer and inclusive cities.

In Kenya, the Rural Women Initiative created an "Adopt a Street" initiative that encourages neighbors to keep the area around them clean. They also partner with a community radio station for a weekly broadcast on "Clean Environment – Good Health". In collaboration with partners, these women also petitioned the president

to support the Bill on the Ban of Plastics in the country because manufacturers and traders had gone to court to stop the ban. They continue to advocate for the ban.

A key principle of the Huairou Commission's grassroots empowerment programme is leadership development through the Leadership Support Process (LSP). LSP tools are simple but powerful ideas and methods designed to build the capacities of grassroots women as effective advocates for themselves and their communities. The LSP builds strong partnerships and movements by developing connected, reflective and empowered individual leaders. Through this process, many grassroots women have led the way in creating national and regional networks for collaborative efforts in implementing gender strategies of the NUA. Partnering with other global organisations has also opened opportunities for the Huairou Commission to amplify grassroots women leaders' voices on the global stage. The Commission has consistently brought grassroots leaders to global and regional policy, advocacy and partnership platforms in order to gain recognition for grassroots women as development partners. These women are now seen as experts in community development and also as champions of grassroots involvement in creating inclusive cities. They also serve on various global organisation advisory boards and are frequent speakers and panelists at global meetings.

## **4. Challenges and Recommendations**

The challenges faced by most of the grassroots women groups in implementing the cross-cutting themes of the NUA goals are similar. Some of these are described below:

As previously stated, the first step in knowing a community is mapping. Governments and civil society groups must dedicate resources for geospatial land tools and other disaggregated data collection tools. This information is essential for effective urban development and resource allocation. Since grassroots women and indigenous groups know their communities best, they can be key actors in obtaining this data and can collaborate with governments when resources for collection are limited. Community data can also be very useful in augmenting official data.

In general, funding is limited or non-existent for community work. Women are reluctant to participate in community projects because they have to work as unpaid volunteers. As it is, majority of grassroots women work in unpaid or marginally paid jobs, so they do not have the time or resources to volunteer. Funding is also required



for other needs such as workshops and training, resource materials, dissemination of information, and project writing work. Women are often inexperienced in and feel intimidated by the complex processes surrounding public policy bureaucracy. Without training, they are ill-equipped to navigate these barriers to effective participation. The Huairou Commission recommends that flexible funding be made available to support community-based grassroots training and education on community organising, project implementation, leadership building and participatory governance. Funders must recognize the important role of grassroots women in resilience and support work and invest in up-scaling community initiatives.

Grassroots women are also limited in their ability to participate in urban life because of the dangers they encounter in public spaces and transportation. The women know what is needed to make them feel safer in cities. Their input should be incorporated in planning and implementing safety measures in communities, and also for safe and affordable transportation and public spaces. Concurrently, authorities must be intensively trained and monitored on reducing VAW. Additionally, judicial reforms and practices must be instituted to enforce laws that protect women from violence so they can participate in processes of governance. What also needs to be ensured is their accessibility to training on civic engagement and policy processes, economic and educational opportunities, and improvement in urban-rural linkages for women farmers and food security.

In many cases, grassroots women are seen as end users of services rather than community experts. Often, government authorities do not recognize the value of local knowledge that these women have, resulting in their exclusion from urban planning. Additionally, traditional authorities and cultures are sometimes unaware of or disregard women's concerns in the urban process. Gender-sensitive planning must include women. To ensure that the perspectives and concerns of women are included in urban planning, governments and civil society must facilitate their greater participation at all levels of policy decision-making and planning. Women's involvement in implementation and monitoring across all areas of urbanisation will necessarily contribute to women's empowerment and gender equity. It is this vision that the grassroots members of the Huairou Commission are committed to. It is time that this vision is taken forward and grassroots women are recognized as key partners and experts in community development, and for localizing the vision of the NUA including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## Chapter 6

# BUILDING INCLUSIVE & ACCESSIBLE CITIES —THE OPPORTUNITY IS NOW

*Javed Abidi*

### 1. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 goals and 169 targets, has given the nations of the world a very ambitious framework with the underlying theme of “leave no one behind”. The principle of non-discrimination and that of inclusion lies at the heart of this agenda. To understand how to not leave anyone behind, it is important for us to identify those that have been left behind or are the farthest behind in the global development agenda. Additionally, it is important to understand why marginalised sections of the society, particularly people with disabilities face exclusion. In order for us to be able to truly appreciate the relationship between marginalisation and disability, it is imperative to understand how the concept and perception of disability has evolved over the years.

### 2. Understanding Disability

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 15 per cent of the world lives with a disability. Of this, as many as 80 per cent or 800 million live in countries of the Global South. A look at the socio-economic status of people with disabilities reflects a very dismal scenario. People with disabilities also comprise 20 per cent of the world’s poorest (Elwan 1999). Even in high-income countries, there is a vicious link between disability and poverty. For instance, in the United States people with disabilities made up 47 per cent of those in poverty and 65 per cent of those in long-term poverty (DESA 2015). Similarly, rates of employment and education also show that people with disabilities have less access to opportunities.

The understanding of disability has evolved over the years. Historically, disability was looked at as a charity issue. It then moved on to be looked at as a medical

issue – something that needs to be cured or corrected. By the 60s and 70s, the social organization of people around disability issues took roots, which eventually led to the development of the social model of disability. The understanding that disability is part of human diversity and that it is a human rights and development issue is intrinsic to the social model of disability.

Another important aspect that needs to be reiterated every time disability and development are brought under discussion is that disability is not homogenous. Each individual with a disability has different needs and goes through different experiences. Moreover, not all disabilities are visible. Often disabilities that are visible are the ones that get any accommodation in the form of ramps or Braille or other such facilities. More often than not, people with invisible disabilities are excluded because society at large, and policymakers in particular do not understand the different needs. Without acknowledging this, inclusion, for persons with disabilities, is difficult to achieve because the exclusion faced by people are not just wide-spread, they are also systemic.

### **3. Urbanization & Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities**

It is estimated that today 56 per cent of the world lives in cities. By 2050, this is projected to reach 66 per cent. Of this, about 15 per cent would be people with disabilities. According to the United Nations (UN), the largest urban growth will take place in India, China and Nigeria. These countries will account for 37 per cent of the projected growth of the world's urban population between 2014 and 2050 (World Urbanization Prospects, 2014).

Urbanization has thus been called one of 21st century's most transformative trends. However, it is not just about rural population moving to urban areas for livelihood or other opportunities. At its heart, it is about rights and how different sections of society exercise them. It is also about services and how equitable these are. In other words, when we think urbanization, we need to think beyond state of the art cities, and ask if everyone has the same access to adequate standard of living. This could be housing, health, water and sanitation, education, employment, recreation, and political participation, among others. People who today are excluded from the development discourse and its benefits, and face marginalization at multiple levels, already have the odds stacked against them in becoming equal citizens in our future cities (*See Box 6.1*).

**Box 6.1: Disability & India**

According to the National Census of 2011, 26.8 million people in India live with a disability. This accounts for 2.21 per cent of the population. A look at the socio-economic data of this population reveals that most of them come from marginalized sections.

For instance, a UNESCO and UNICEF (2015) study states that out of 2.9 million children with disabilities in India, 990,000 children aged 6 to 14 years (34 per cent) are out of school. Similar findings have come from another NCERT study that found that only 21.1 per cent schools in the country adhere to inclusive education for children with disabilities. It is not surprising then that only 54.5 per cent of India's people with disabilities are literate. As such, 13.4 million people with disabilities in India are in the employable age of 15–59 years of age. Of this, 9.9 million or 73.8 per cent are non-workers or marginal workers (GOI 2011).

If these barriers are not addressed now, these population groups will only be left further behind. Creating equitable cities is therefore an imperative, if we are to optimise the opportunities provided by the rapid urbanization that the world is seeing today and will continue to observe in the coming decades. This understanding has been part of the several human rights and development frameworks that the world has deliberated upon and agreed to in the past few years (*See Box 6.2*). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets recognize the impact that urbanization will have on global quest to end poverty, ensure universal primary education, good health, water and sanitation, climate change, among others.

## **4. New Urban Agenda & Disability**

The New Urban Agenda or Habitat III recognises the transformative potential of urbanization, such that no one is left behind. It advocates for a paradigm shift in looking at the “science of cities” and how human settlements are planned, designed, financed, developed, governed and managed. By doing so, it hopes to end poverty and hunger, reduce inequalities, promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, achieve gender equality and empowerment, among others (UN 2016).

The New Urban Agenda also emphasises the fact that people with disabilities are one of the population groups that face multiple discriminations and calls for particular attention to be given to their right to adequate housing, access to physical and social infrastructure including to information and communication technologies, promoting decent employment, among others. Article 36 of the New Urban Agenda states:

We commit ourselves to promoting appropriate measures in cities and human settlements that facilitate access for persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment of cities, in particular to public spaces, public transport, housing, education and health facilities, public information and communication (including information and communications technologies and systems) and other facilities and services open or provided to the public, in both urban and rural areas.

In order to achieve this vision, Habitat III calls for effective participation and collaboration among all relevant stakeholders, including persons with disabilities and their organisations; promoting capacity building initiatives to empower and strengthen the skills and abilities of persons with disabilities and their organizations, to advocate for their rights; and to empower subnational and local governments, including local government associations; among others. It also calls for enhanced capacity of national, subnational and local governments in data collection, mapping, analysis and dissemination and in promoting evidence-based governance, building on a shared knowledge base using both globally comparable as well as locally generated data, including through censuses, household surveys, population registers, community based monitoring processes and other relevant sources, disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national, subnational and local contexts.

Effective implementation of this agenda, therefore, stands to change the way people with disabilities are included in the opportunities provided by urbanisation. It also reiterates the very important role of sub-national and local governments, and knowledge sharing at all levels in order to realize true inclusion. Herein, two interesting developments reflect both the challenges and opportunities that urbanisation provides in terms of inclusion of persons with disabilities.

**Box 6.2: Disability in Recent Development Frameworks**

**2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have 11 references to persons with disabilities. There are three mentions in the Declaration; seven instances in the Goals 4 (education), 8 (employment), 10 (reducing inequalities), 11 (inclusive cities), 17 (means of implementation); and one mention in Follow up and Review under data disaggregation. Additionally, all universal goals and targets, and those that relate to vulnerable populations also apply to people with disabilities.

**Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030**

The Sendai Framework recognises that persons with disabilities and their organisations are critical in the assessment of disaster risk and in designing and implementing plans tailored to specific requirements, taking into consideration principles of universal design.

There are specific mentions of disability in the Sendai Framework under the Preamble, Guiding Principles, and in Priority 4 (Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction). It urges governments to engage with persons with disabilities; incorporate a disability perspective in all policies and programmes; empowering persons with disabilities to publicly lead and promote universally accessible response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction; among others.

## **5. Smart Cities Mission & Inclusion: The Indian Experience**

The Smart Cities Mission is a flagship programme of the Government of India that was launched in 2015 to revive cities on the ground of sustainability and inclusive development through the provision of core infrastructure and a decent quality of life. The purpose of the Smart Cities Mission is to drive economic growth and improve the quality of life of people by enabling local area development and harnessing technology, especially technology that leads to smart outcomes. It is meant to set examples that can be replicated both within and outside the smart city, catalysing the creation of similar smart cities in various parts of the country (GOI 2014).

This Mission initially chose 100 cities based on a competitive process and each selected city was assessed, ranked and funded on their smart city proposals. The proposals are both pan-city and area based. The area-based proposal tends to incorporate three major strategies for the development of the city: retrofitting, redevelopment and green field development. The pan-city proposal comprises of a city-wide ICT based solution aiming to resolve various urban problems (NCPEDP 2017).

An analysis of these proposals was carried out by the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) and it found scant mention of disability. There was also no way to ensure the incorporation of disability in each city's proposal. While several of the city proposals did talk about disabled friendly pathway design or barrier free walkways, almost all of them neglected the access to IT enabled solutions like e-governance and citizen services. Sadly, the mission with its notion of inclusiveness fails to integrate disability as a key issue in achieving truly smart cities.

This lack of attention becomes especially worrying in light of the fact that in the same year when this mission was launched, the government had also launched the Accessible India Campaign in order to achieve universal access for persons with disabilities. (See Box 6.3). However, the Accessible India Campaign finds no convergence with the Smart Cities Mission despite the fact that there are 39 cities common between both these missions (See Table 6.1). This reflects the fact that disability is still far from being considered a multi-dimensional development issue.

Over the past year, NCPEDP has been creating a platform to bring convergence between the Smart Cities Mission and the Accessible India Campaign. As part of this campaign, NCPEDP is working closely with city governments across the country to ensure that the Smart Cities Mission locally are aware of the importance of building accessible smart cities. As part of this work, a series of Roundtable Discussions were organised in Guwahati, Bhubaneshwar, Udaipur, Varanasi, Pune, among others

In collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), NCPEDP has also developed a Knowledge Report on “Structural Framework for Accessible Urban Infrastructure in Smart Cities”. This enabled a national level discourse between multiple stakeholders, who now ensure that accessibility is an integral aspect of the on going campaigns on urbanization. Here,

**Box 6.3: Accessible India Campaign**

The Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyaan) is a nationwide, flagship campaign launched by the Prime Minister of India on December 3, 2015 to promote universal access for persons with disabilities.

The targets are:

- Increase the accessibility of the physical environment;
- Enhance the accessibility and usability of public transportation;
- Enhance the accessibility and usability of information and communication services;
- Enhancing the pool of sign language Interpreters;
- Enhancing the proportion of daily captioning and sign language interpretation of public news programmes.

some of the global best practices and tools are being drawn upon, particularly those that can support the creation of inclusive smart cities.

## **6. ICT Accessibility & Urbanisation: The Global Experience**

In 2016, the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs (G3ict) and World Enabled launched the ‘Digital Inclusion in Smart Cities’ initiative. The objective of this campaign is to underline the unprecedented opportunities that technology will create in cities of the future. This also means that unless these opportunities are made inclusive, the digital divide for persons with disabilities and the aging population will remain. The initiative states:

There is a compelling human rights and business case for infusing accessibility into global Smart Cities programs. Governments that deploy accessible technology in their Smart Cities initiatives will have more innovative, equitable and impactful results across key program areas, including e.g. in education, healthcare, and transportation. Technology companies that include accessibility and inclusion as part of serving Smart Cities worldwide will have an edge over competitors that do not. They will be providing products and solutions that support rich, personalized, citizen



**Table 6.1: Mapping of Cities under the Smart Cities Mission vis-à-vis the Accessible India Campaign**

| S.No. | Name of State/UT            | Smart Cities Mission                                    | Accessible India Campaign                                    |
|-------|-----------------------------|---|--|
| 1     | Andaman and Nicobar Islands | Port Blair  | Port Blair   |
| 2     | Andhra Pradesh              | Vishakhapatnam, Tirupati, Kakinada                      | Vishakhapatnam   |
| 3     | Arunachal Pradesh           | Pasighat  |  |
| 4     | Assam                       | Guwahati  | Guwahati   |
| 5     | Bihar                       | Muzaffarpur, Bhagalpur, Biharsharif                     |  |
| 6     | Chandigarh                  | Chandigarh  | Chandigarh   |
| 7     | Chhattisgarh                | Raipur, Bilaspur  | Raipur   |
| 8     | Dadra and Nagar Haveli      | Silvassa  | Silvassa   |
| 9     | Daman and Diu               | Diu   |  |
| 10    | Delhi                       | New Delhi   | Delhi  |
| 11    | Goa                         | Panaji  | Panaji   |
| 12    | Gujarat                     | Gandhinagar, Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, Rajkot, Dahod  | Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat, Gandhinagar                      |
| 13    | Haryana                     | Karnal, Faridabad                                       | Faridabad  |
| 14    | Himachal Pradesh            | Dharamshala   |  |
| 15    | Jammu & Kashmir             | Jammu, Srinagar   | Srinagar   |
| 16    | Jharkhand                   | Ranchi  | Ranchi   |
| 17    | Karnataka                   | Mangaluru,  | Belagavi, Shivamogga, Hubballi Dharwad, Tumakuru, Davanagere |
| 18    | Kerala                      | Kochi   |  |
| 19    | Lakshadweep                 | Kavaratti   | Kavaratti  |
| 20    | Madhya Pradesh              | Bhopal, Indore, Gwalior, Jabalpur, Satna, Ujjain, Sagar | Bhopal, Indore   |

**Table 6.1: (contd...)**

| S.No.                         | Name of State/UT | Smart Cities Mission  | Accessible India Campaign               |
|-------------------------------|------------------|---|---|
| 21                            | Maharashtra      | Greater Mumbai, Thane, Kalyan Dombivali, Navi Mumbai, Nashik, Amravati, Solapur, Nagpur, Pune, Aurangabad                     | Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Nashik            |
| 22                            | Manipur          | Imphal  | Imphal                                  |
| 23                            | Meghalaya        | Shillong  | Shillong                                |
| 24                            | Mizoram          | Aizawl  | Aizawl                                  |
| 25                            | Nagaland         | Kohima  | Kohima                                  |
| 26                            | Odisha           | Bhubaneswar, Rourkela   | Bhubaneswar                             |
| 27                            | Puducherry       | Oulgaret  |   |
| 28                            | Punjab           | Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Amritsar   | Ludhiana                                |
| 29                            | Rajasthan        | Jaipur, Udaipur, Ajmer, Kota  | Jaipur                                  |
| 30                            | Sikkim           | Namchi  |   |
| 31                            | Tamil Nadu       | Coimbatore, Chennai, Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Vellore, Salem, Erode, Tiruppur, Thanjavur, Tirunelveli, Dindigul, Thoothukudi | Chennai, Coimbatore                     |
| 32                            | Telangana        | Warangal, Karimnagar  | -                                       |
| 33                            | Tripura          | Agartala  | Agartala                                |
| 34                            | Uttar Pradesh    | Meerut, Moradabad, Aligarh, Saharanpur, Bareilly, Jhansi, Kanpur, Allahabad, Lucknow, Varanasi, Ghaziabad, Agra, Rampur       | Kanpur, Lucknow, Jhansi, Varanasi, Agra |
| 35                            | Uttarakhand      | Dehradun  | Dehradun                                |
| 36                            | West Bengal      | New Town Kolkata, Bidhannagar, Durgapur, Haldia   | Kolkata                                 |
| <b>Total number of cities</b> |                  | <b>100</b>  | <b>39</b>                               |

centric services that serve a broader population and are usable in wider variety of environments. (Source: [www.g3ict.org](http://www.g3ict.org))

Under this initiative, a survey was conducted among 250 experts around the world. Results showed that more than 90 per cent of experts agree or strongly agree that smart cities initiatives leveraging ICT accessibility would help persons with disabilities and older persons to be more included in their communities. Around 60 per cent of the respondents believe that smart cities are failing people with disabilities, and only 18 per cent could think of a city using accessibility standards around technology. The respondents included public and private sector, advocacy organisations, civil society and academia.

G3ict and World Enabled have developed a toolkit that contains four tools to help smart cities worldwide to include a focus on ICT accessibility and digital inclusion of persons with disabilities and older persons. The toolkit comprises four steps towards creating inclusive smart cities – implementing priority ICT accessibility standards; communicating the case for a stronger commitment to digital inclusion; adopting an ICT accessibility procurement policy; and a database for digital solutions in smart cities (ElDeeb 2017). This toolkit is now available in 8 languages.

## **7. Conclusion**

Over the past few years, especially in the run up to Habitat III, there has been a concerted effort to include accessibility as an underlying principle of inclusion. As a result, we see the New Urban Agenda making specific references to disability. The same holds true for the Sustainable Development Goals. Several corporates such as Microsoft and AT&T have also put their weight behind building inclusive and accessible cities of the future (smartcities4all 2017).

Accessibility is a human rights issue. By actively keeping 15 per cent of the population away from the opportunities that urbanisation provides, is a blatant disregard of their right. Even if one is not convinced by the human rights argument, there is a whole business imperative to inclusion that should be looked at. According to the UN, the cost of incorporating the universal design in design and planning stage itself is almost nil or a mere one per cent additional cost. Additionally cities that depend on tourism are likely to face an opportunity loss of an estimated 15–20 per cent of the global market share if they exclude tourists with disabilities (UN 2016).

Leaving people with disabilities out of economic opportunities leads to a loss of 3–7 per cent of GDP annually (ILO 2010).

The inclusion of persons with disabilities in smart cities also has a huge bearing on the larger debate surrounding inclusive urbanisation. The concept of universal design, which is intrinsic to accessibility, ensures that the design is inclusive of maximum possible users. Additionally, it is widely recognised that designing for a unique user base such as persons with disabilities, older persons, and people with other limitations, etc. drive innovative solutions.

Recent trends show that there is a growing discourse around these aspects of inclusion. Globally this progress has been steered by legal frameworks, but this may not be the case in countries of the global south. Therefore, there is a need to create a much greater demand from primary stakeholders – persons with disabilities and their families, for services and opportunities. This demand will not come unless more and more people are involved in the conversation around inclusive cities, which in turn will happen with awareness about rights and responsibilities. The window of opportunity for ensuring that these conversations trigger action towards inclusive urbanisation is in reality quite slender. And if this is opportunity is missed, the ambition of ‘leaving no one behind’ may not be achieved for a long time to come.

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## Chapter 7

# URBAN COMMONS AND SUSTAINABLE CITIES

*Birgit Daiber*

### 1. Introduction

This chapter brings into focus the discourse and practice of urban commons, through a discussion of some ongoing movements and projects in the cities of Europe and Global South. In many ways, these initiatives anticipate and affirm the vision of sustainability and equity, as outlined the New Urban Agenda. They also help build our shared knowledge of what works in real-world scenarios.

Today, most megacities of the world are run like for-profit corporations where sustainability is used as just another buzzword, emptied of meaning and value. At its core, the idea of sustainability links our everyday consumption practices with imperatives of production. In contemporary society, particularly in urban contexts, citizens are increasingly disconnected from the conditions and processes of production, such as of the food they eat, the electricity they use, or the houses they live in. As a result, a large number of them fail to relate to concerns of climate change, biodiversity, food security, or urban poverty.

This alienation of people from concerns of degradation of productive resources, pollution through wasteful consumption and social justice, has been described in urban theory as a ‘social metabolic rift’ (McClintock 2010). A move towards sustainability requires therefore that we first overcome this rift. One of the ways this can be achieved is through the adoption of the three tenets derived from the philosophy of urban commons. These are as follows: One, reinstating a social/civic sense of collective ownership of environment so as to discourage wasteful consumption; two, curing the ‘extinction of experience’ of nature and an ‘environmental generational amnesia’ among urban inhabitants, by reviving their proximity to nature and participation in collective

production and sustenance activities; and three, innovatively reorganizing our urban governance institutions, so as to ensure equitable participation of rich and the poor.

The realization of the New Urban Agenda hinges upon our capacity to the urban commons approach in all aspects of urban life. In this context, our proposals and plans for smart cities need to pay greater attention to this approach, in particular affordable housing, open public spaces, urban agricultural activities, and participative democratic governance of urban resources and institutions.

## **2. ‘Reclaiming our Commons’**

Commons and commoning can be seen “active processes whereby subaltern organisations and groups of people identify and take control of resources and manage them in common, i.e. democratically and collectively, not privately or in an exploitative manner” (Cato and North 2017). In nearly all parts of the globe, initiatives and projects on commons are on the rise.

As such, the movement on commons is not very old and one can perhaps trace its emergence to the massive struggle against privatisation of water in Cochabamba, Bolivia in the early 2000s. Notably, in 2010, the UN general assembly made a decision to include access to clean water as a basic human right into the Human Rights’ Charter. In 2012, Italian citizens also decided in a referendum that water should be a common good. The same decision was taken by citizens of Berlin and Thessaloniki. Also ongoing are struggles of small farmers for land and natural seeds, such as the Brazilian movement, ‘Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST)’, which is the largest social movement in Latin America with an estimated membership of 1.5 million people and a presence in 23 of Brazil’s 27 states. It is about landless peasants settling on the land of absentee landlords, and using it for cooperative farming and construction of houses, schools and clinics. Another example is the struggle of fishermen in India and Brazil for common access to the sea, and against the privatisation of coastal areas.

These few examples show the growing resistance of people all over the world against commodification of nature and essential resources. The declaration, “Reclaim the Commons” at the World Social Forum in Belém 2009, captures it as thus: “...a new vision of society is arising - one that honour human rights, democratic participation, inclusion and cooperation. People are discovering that alternatives and commons-

based approaches offer practical solutions for protecting water and rivers, agricultural soils, seeds, knowledge, sciences, forest, oceans, wind, money, communication and online collaborations, culture, music and other arts, open technologies, free software, public services of education, health or sanitization, biodiversity and the wisdom of traditional knowledge.” In many ways, the commons approach represents one of the most constructive pathways to sustainability, bringing together ecological, democratic and social needs in a harmonious blend.

### **3. Initiatives on Urban Commons**

#### **Examples from Europe**

Urban commons is an important area within the overall field of commons, and a whole set of approaches and questions have shaped its course. Foster and Iaione (2016) pose: “what are the possibilities of bringing more collaborative governance tools to decisions about how city space and common goods are used, who has access to them, and how they are shared among diverse urban population?” On similar lines, the P2P-Foundation in Ghent, Belgium, which is developing a general urban commons transition plan for cities and proposing new forms of public commons partnerships, asks: “what can cities do to respond to the new demands of citizens as common; what their role may be in facilitating a social-ecological transition; and what institutional adaptations would favour such a role” (Bauwens 2017).

A number of initiatives on urban commons are currently underway within Europe, started variously by specific groups of citizens or by municipalities working on participatory democracy. These include projects such as decentralized use of regenerative energy sources, social housing, digital democracy, urban gardening, open spaces for culture and art, among others.

As an example, in the city of Naples in Southern Italy, the Mayor de Magistris responded to the demands of the Italian movement “Bene Comune”, to create a department for commons in his Municipality. Further, the City Council changed the municipal statute by inserting ‘commons’ as one of the interests to be protected and recognised as a fundamental right. Backed by these municipal policies, movement activists occupied more than 20 abandoned buildings for social, political and cultural use.

Another example is from Barcelona, where a participatory citizen’s platform, “Barcelona en comú”, has started work on decentralized and democratic controlled use of renewable energy sources at the Municipal level. The platform was mobilized



when Ada Colau, an activist with the movement, “okupas”, became the Mayor of the city in 2015, with support of Left parties in the City Council. Briefly, “okupas” is about occupying abandoned houses and giving them to families who lost their homes during the European crisis. Its activists also try to save the old popular boroughs at the seaside, from being taken over by international investors. Once in power, Ada extended cooperation to many progressive socio-ecological local movements. One of the first international activities undertaken by her administration in 2016 was the signing of a proclamation on open and refugee-friendly cities against the inhumanity of EU and its member states, together with Mytilene (Lesbos) and Lampedusa (Sicily). In 2017, Barcelona was invited to “Fearless Cities”, an international conference with participants from 180 cities of the world. They raised the slogan “democracy was born in cities and here we’ll win it back” and resolved to create global networks of solidarity and hope “in the face of hate, walls and borders”. Like many other cities in the world, Barcelona is thus keenly embracing practices of urban participatory democracy.

In Germany, “MietshäuserSyndikat” (MHS) is a network that has been launched to support self-organized, cohousing projects. It also aims at reducing re-commercialization by ensuring that all inhabitants co-own the real estate assets of these cohousing projects. For a cohousing initiative to join MHS, some requirements must be met. The project needs to be self-organized by its residents, and a house and a financing plan must be on hand. The syndicate also connects successful projects with emerging ones to facilitate exchange, i.e., once a cohousing project establishes a secure financial basis, it needs to support new projects that are in the critical, cost-intensive early phases. Since 1983, the network has grown to consist of 111 cohousing projects with a total of about 3,000 residents. Twenty-one initiatives throughout the country are in the process of joining the network (Kichler 2017).

## **Examples from the Global South**

There are also numerous examples from cities of the Global South. A recent publication on urban commons, “Sharing Cities – Activating the Urban Commons” presents 137 case studies from across the world, of which at least 28 cases come from the Global South (Shareable 2017).

However, there are cases that are well known, but not necessarily included in such reports, such as the self-management initiatives in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro, which are often in conflict with both authorities and Mafias, and the “Bolivarian Revolution” in Venezuela. Since the beginning of this revolution, direct democratic

participation and new forms of communism have been actively promoted - which are functioning even today though under very difficult circumstances. One also saw the establishment of communal councils, as legal and social structures, should be regarded with special interest in our discussion on commons. “In April 2006, the National Assembly approved the Law of Communal Councils, which was reformed in 2009 following a broad consulting process of councils’ spokespeople. The communal councils in urban areas encompass 150-400 families; in rural zones, a minimum of 20 families; and in indigenous zones, at least 10 families. The councils build a non-representative structure of direct participation that exists parallel to the elected representative bodies of constituted power. The communal councils are financed directly by national state institutions, thus avoiding interference from municipal organs. The law does not give any entity to the authority to accept or reject proposals presented by the councils. The relationship between the councils and established institutions, however, is not always harmonious; conflicts arise principally from the slowness of constituted power to respond to demands made by the councils and from attempts at interference. The communal councils tend to transcend the division between political and civil society (i.e., between those who govern and those who are governed)” (Azzellini 2013). Similar examples include the “Quiero mi Barrio” programme in Chile or the Social- Housing-Cooperatives in Egypt, where one third of the population is participating in about 2300 social-housing cooperatives.

Another example is from Brazil, which is discussed as follows by Cato and North (2016): “The Conjunto Palmeira is a rural town of 30,000 people in north-eastern Brazil which has traditionally suffered from high unemployment. Although the town did have small- scale manufacturing, the products were sold in nearby cities and much of the value was lost to middlemen. Communal activity in the town developed as a result of demonstrations against the poor state of infrastructure: the town had no facilities for sanitation, clean water, electricity or other public services. From the early 1980s an ‘Association of Inhabitants of Palmeira Neighbourhood’ was established and in turn this group set up the Banco Palmas, which issues its own currency without being backed by the national currency. There are currently around 30,000 palmas in circulation (more than \$15,000). The bank has six paid employees, who receive 20% of their salary in palmas. Banco Palmas makes small loans to local people, which only circulate within the neighbourhood. With these loans local people to create small businesses, thereby generating an income and enabling them to pay the loans back. The creation of currency has enabled the strengthening of the local economy and the creation of more than 1,000 jobs” (ibid).

Seoul, a city of 10 million inhabitants, represents one of the most promising examples in South-East Asia of a Municipality that is promoting democratic participation. In 2012, the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) launched the Sharing City Seoul program, and also enacted the Seoul Metropolitan Government Ordinance on the Promotion of Sharing, which provides a legal foundation for this initiative. The purpose of the ordinance is to “maximize utilization of resources, recover communities and revitalize the regional economy” through emphasis on sharing. It defines sharing as “activities that create social, economic and environmental values by jointly using resources, such as space, goods, information, talent and experience.” The ordinance designates official sharing enterprises that address urban challenges and meet social, economic or environmental criteria. Specifically, the Mayor of Seoul may designate an organization that intends to solve social problems through sharing as a “sharing organization” or “sharing enterprise” following deliberations by the Sharing Promotion Committee of the SMG. The Mayor may also provide funds from SMG’s Small and Medium Enterprises Fund, and allow a sharing organization or enterprise to use a public facility at a reduced fee where necessary to serve the public interest (Sharp 2017)

The ethic of sharing is also at the heart of a peer-to-peer generosity project in Ahmedabad, on the issue of food, which one of our basic necessities in life, but which is becoming scarce across the globe. According to the World Food Program, approximately 795 million people in the world don’t have access to sufficient and healthy food. But what would happen if those who do start sharing their food generously with others? It may not of course solve the problem of food scarcity, but it could be a significant step in ending hunger. One such experiment is being carried out by Seva Cafe, which was launched in 2006, and is run by a few volunteers, who make and serve meals to guests everyday. Based on the model of gift economy, the meals are served as an unconditional gift, with no price. Guests may choose to pay or volunteer with the organization, but they aren’t required to do either. The bill at Seva cafe reads “0/-” with only this footnote, “Your meal was a gift from someone who came before you. To keep the chain of gifts alive, we invite you to pay it forward for those who dine after you.” Anjali Desai, a volunteer at Seva Cafe, says: “I think when you come into a space with strangers and you feel at home, you suddenly realise that this world is one family” (Balwani 2017).

Another successful initiative is from Jakarta, on disaster response management through crowd-sourced civic data. It is called PetaJakarta. Jakarta is one of the most

densely populated cities in the world. Every year it gets flooded during monsoons, since 40 percent of the city is at or below sea level - a problem that is going to intensify with the expected rise in global sea levels due to climate change. Interestingly, Jakarta has one of the highest concentrations of active Twitter users in the world and an overall high use of mobiles. Given this context, a public-private partnership between Twitter, Jakarta Emergency Management Agency, the University of Wollongong in Australia, and others led to the development of CogniCity, an open-source intelligence framework that manages spatial data received from mobile messaging apps. The first platform built on CogniCity was PetaJakarta, a Twitter-based crowdsourcing map for flood data. It relies on Twitter to organize and display real-time information about flooding to the city's residents. It allows users to geotag Tweets to indicate hazardous flooded areas, which are verified and added to a map of government flood alerts that anyone can use. The platform has received international praise from organizations such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Conway 2017).

In Philippines, social housing programmes for the urban poor and informal settlers are being designed and implemented by a consortium of organisations. The housing backlog in the country is currently up to five million. Almost 1.2 million of the urban poor live in precarious and untenured housing in informal settlements, of which 104,000 live in Metro Manila's danger zones, which includes the easement of waterways and right of way of power transmission lines. Another large group of 107,000 families live within the easement of the south railway system from Manila to Bicol. Yet others live on large estates of government owned and controlled corporations (GOCCs) or on private lands, without legal tenure.

Kilos Maralita (KM) is a network of community associations comprising informal settler families. The associations are registered either as housing cooperatives (with the Cooperative Development Authority) or homeowners' associations (with the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board). Other members of KM are federations of urban poor peoples' organizations. Currently, KM focuses on assisting informal settlers' associations prepare comprehensive social housing project proposals, also called peoples' proposals, and negotiates for finance with government agencies, particularly the Social Housing Finance Corporation (SHFC). In recent years, KM also initiated the KM Federation of Housing and Community Service Cooperatives (KM Federation) to undertake business undertakings to support resettled communities. Two NGOs, the Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD) and the Institute for Philippine Cooperatives and Social Enterprise Development (IPCSED) provide KM and the KM Federation

and their affiliated community associations with various forms of organizational and business development assistance. Together, these bodies, KM, the KM Federation, IPCSED, and IPD constitute a Consortium for Informal Settlers Families.

To date, 13 housing projects proposed by KM affiliates have received final approval for funding by SHFC under the HDH program, with a total cost of over P4.4 Billion, covering a total of 10,400 families. The average project cost per family housing unit is P410,000 (the financing ceiling is P450,000 per family housing unit). Of these, at least eight projects are already under construction (Villanueva 2017).

## 4. Conclusion

The cases discussed above exemplify the diversity of practices on urban commons, initiated variously by citizens, municipalities, local administrators and traditional NGOs. Many of the projects start as acts of disobedience against commodification of space, resource and basic services, but every such project is only the beginning of a process. What is often seen is that having gained experience in democratic participation and management, the stakeholders move on to develop new initiatives. The need of the hour is to recognize these successful alternatives and use these learnings to redefine our discourse and practice on sustainable urban development.

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