
ADDRESSING URBAN INEQUALITY

The role of local government

In many countries, local governments play increasing important roles in the provision of basic services, infrastructures and local development strategies that are central to the reduction of poverty and inequalities.

The following summarizes the key points with regard to the potential of local governments to address inequalities, towards a more comprehensive vision of territorial disparities in the Post-2015 development agenda.

Inequalities most felt at the local level

In a world where **national growth does not necessarily lead to decreasing inequalities**, it is becoming more evident that poverty needs to be tackled locally both in the developed and developing world. Local government play a key role in reducing inequalities in key aspects of sustainable development – as the provider or manager of a range of basic services and the implementer of many regulations and other measures linked to health, education, economic opportunity and risk reduction.

One in seven of the world's population lives in urban 'slums' or informal settlements that have inadequate or no provision for infrastructure and services. In low- and middle-income nations, these settlements often house a third to a half of the city's population (and usually a higher proportion of its workforce). It is within these settlements that many aspects of inequality become most evident – in provision of basic services and infrastructure, in housing quality and in access to health and education.

Access to basic service

One of the **hallmarks of good governance within any city is universal provision for safe water, good quality sanitation, solid waste collection, electricity, primary education and healthcare**, i.e. no inequality in such provision, even in cities with very high levels of income inequality. Local government is usually the provider of some of these, and influences the provision of the others. Some responsibilities are often shared with national (or state/provincial) governments (e.g. for health care, schools, disaster response, policing). For 'public' services that are provided by private enterprises, it is usually local government that sets the terms, manages the contract (including the selection of process) and supervises provision.

There is strong evidence from many nations that competent, accountable local governments have had central roles in reducing inequalities, giving voice to the poor and most vulnerable. Many local governments have greatly reduced inequalities, through upgrading programmes in informal settlements, including expanding water, sewerage and drainage networks, expanding or improving provision for solid-waste collection, and

influencing the prices and availabilities of housing through provision of land. In Africa and Asia, sub-national governments in many countries implemented free basic school programmes, school feeding and free transportation programmes.

The response to MDGs 4, 5 and 6 has been monumental, in part due to the role played by sub-national governments in providing and managing public health facilities in their respective jurisdictions. Sub-national governments were the focus for mobilizing community groups, and resources, and for using local systems for campaigns on immunization, maternal care, HIV-AIDs, and distribution of mosquito nets.

Social inclusion and participatory democracy

Women's empowerment advanced when sub-national institutions took the lead in implementing programmes. Gender analysis and application featured in local representation, data-collection and decision-making, development prioritization, resource allocation and reporting. In countries such as Armenia, Chile, Rwanda, Tanzania, Samoa and Bangladesh, this has contributed to significant MDG 3 gains.

Many city governments around the world have implemented **innovative forms of participatory democracy to address the inequalities in voice and influence faced by low-income groups, minorities or groups facing discrimination (for instance women and youth)**. This can be seen in participatory budgeting or planning, local assemblies or "dialogue days" between local elected officers and communities, quotas reserved to ensure the representation of women, traditional authorities or certain minorities and the use of social media and new technologies to encourage participation, as well as different kinds of referenda or consultations.

Many city governments now work with the organizations and federations of 'slum'/shack dwellers to directly address a range of inequalities that include housing tenure, infrastructure, services, rule of law and participation.

Limited data on growing challenges

One key reason why **inequality has been neglected until now is the lack of data on most of its aspects**. Most national governments and international agencies rely on national sample surveys to provide data on health and service provision. But **collecting data in national sample surveys means very limited data available on inequalities within sub-national territorial divisions**. And the data that governments and international agencies choose to collect obviously influences what they choose to focus on.

The need to increase the capacity of urban governments to address these inequalities and to be accountable to their populations is particularly urgent in sub-Saharan Africa where the deficits in infrastructure and service provision are largest – as well as in many Asian nations where rapid urbanization is outstripping the ability of local government to manage growth. UN projections suggest that almost all the increases in the world's population from 2010 to 2030 will be in urban centers in low- and middle-income nations (United Nations 2012). How well local governments serve these 1.4 billion new urban dwellers (and how well higher levels of government support them to do so) will have very large implications for whether inequality is reduced and sustainable development achieved.