

ADDRESSING INEQUALITIES

The Heart of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Future We Want for All

Global Thematic Consultation

**WHO CAN ADDRESS URBAN INEQUALITY?
THE OFTEN FORGOTTEN ROLES OF LOCAL
GOVERNMENT**

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

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SUMMARY:

This paper focuses on the roles and responsibilities of city, municipal and regional (in the connotation of sub-national) governments in reducing inequalities in urban areas - within their boundaries, within their nation and within the global urban population of over 3.5 billion. The Paper argues that the focus on national government attention to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to sustainable development has obscured the increasing burden of inequalities and how much addressing these inequalities depend on local governments. Despite the recorded progress, significant deficiencies in universal access to basic local services continue to exist with regard to water and sanitation, health, education, environment protection and risk prevention. Disparities are aggravated in urban areas and their periphery with increasing slum population affecting particularly the poorest, predominantly women in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, but also in some Latin American countries. This paper focuses on the role of local governments in reducing inequalities in key aspects of sustainable development – such as the provision of infrastructure, the provision or management of a range of basic services, the implementation of many regulations and other measures linked to health, economic opportunity and risk reduction, and the inclusion of the poor and marginalized in local decision making.

Introduction¹

Around one in seven of the world's population lives in poverty in urban areas – mostly in overcrowded poor quality homes in informal settlements that lack provision for basic infrastructure and services. There is a very large backlog in urban centers in low-income, and many middle-income nations. For instance, in 2010, around 700 million urban dwellers lacked water piped into their premises and there has been no increase in the proportion of the urban population so served since 1990 (UNICEF and WHO 2012). The number lacking provision for sanitation to a standard adequate for supporting good health is likely to be higher than this, although there are no available data. There is also no accurate data on the number or proportion of the urban population with inadequate incomes. The only global statistics are for the \$1 and \$2 a day poverty line, but these are known to greatly under-estimate the scale and depth of poverty as in many urban contexts where the cost of food and non-food needs is higher than these two poverty benchmarks.

Table 1: Estimates for the scale of different aspects of urban poverty in low- and middle-income nations

Type of poverty	Numbers of urban dwellers affected	Notes
Inadequate income in relation to the cost of food and non-food basic needs	800-1,200 million	No accurate figures are available on this and the total varies, depending on the criteria used to set the poverty line (the 'income-level' required for 'basic needs').
Inadequate or no provision for safe, sufficient water and sanitation	More than 700 million for water and 850 million or more for sanitation	The figure for water is the number of urban dwellers lacking water piped to their premises in 2010; the estimate for sanitation is for 2000, and drawn from a detailed global UN review of individual city/urban studies (UN–Habitat (2003a); it has probably increased considerably since then.
Hunger	500 million+?	In many Asian and sub-Saharan African nations, 25-40% of urban children are underweight and/or under height. In many nations, more than half the urban population suffers from food-energy deficiency including India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Ahmed et al 2007)

¹ UCLG wants to acknowledge the significant contribution of David Satterthwaite, from the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in the development of this paper.

Living in housing that is overcrowded, insecure and/or of poor quality and often at risk of forced eviction	c. 1 billion	Based on a 2003 global UN review of the number and proportion of people living in 'slums' (UN-Habitat (2003b) with an allowance for the increase in number since then.
Homelessness (i.e. living on the street or sleeping in open or public places)	c. 100 million	UN estimate. There are also large numbers of people living on temporary sites (for instance construction workers and often their families living on construction sites) that are close to homeless.
Lack of access to health care, education and social protection; also to emergency services	Hundreds of millions?	No global estimates, but many case studies of informal settlements show the lack of provision for these. Access to these may require a legal address which those living in informal settlements lack.
Absence of the rule of law	Hundreds of millions?	No global estimates on this but in a high proportion of informal settlements, there is little or no policing. The absence of the rule of law may show itself in high levels of violence and high murder rates.

This paper focuses on the roles and responsibilities of city, municipal and regional (in the connotation of sub-national) governments in reducing inequalities in urban areas - within their boundaries, within their nation and within the global urban population of over 3.5 billion. Local governments have very large roles and responsibilities in reducing many of the most serious inequalities within their boundaries in health (and its many determinants), access to education, living conditions, exposure to risk, quality of life, participation and other aspects of sustainable development. National government support for local governments is a critical means of reducing inequalities in these between local government units. 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.

The decision to focus on inequalities in urban areas is in part because these have not been given much attention in the past, and in part because of the existing scale of world's urban population and of inequalities within it. In addition, most of the growth in the world's population in the next two decades will be in urban areas in low- and middle-income nations (United Nations 2012). This paper also seeks to highlight the many ways in which competent and accountable city and municipal governments have reduced inequalities.

Perhaps the focus on getting national government attention to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to sustainable development has obscured how much addressing these inequalities depend on local governments. Perhaps too little attention has been given to the key roles of local government in getting universal provision for basic services (i.e. with little or no inequality in such provision). One of the hallmarks of good governance within any city is universal provision for water piped into homes, good quality sanitation, solid waste collection, electricity and drainage i.e. no inequality in such provision, even in cities with very high levels of income inequality.

In all nations, local governments are assigned a range of responsibilities by higher levels of government that, if met, are at the core of reducing or removing many inequalities within and between local government areas. The range of responsibilities allocated to local governments for these obviously vary by nation as do the means by which they are realized – for instance service provision by a government agency or contracted out to private enterprises. The extent to which local governments can meet their responsibilities is dependent on local capacities, but also on the extent of support from national government, and more broadly in the coherence of multi-level governance.

It is largely through local governments that territorial or place-based inequalities have to be addressed – for instance those between the wealthiest and the poorest districts or municipalities within a nation or within a metropolitan area. It is also in nations where national governments recognize the extent to which local governments are the means through which poverty and inequality can be reduced that local governments' potential for development gets recognized. One profound inequality within most nations is in the capacity of local governments to address the needs present within their jurisdictions. Without support from higher levels of government, local governments in the poorer and more peripheral regions struggle to meet their responsibilities. Decentralization may entrench such disadvantage if it does not include national government measures to support local governments and encourage new investments in such regions.

The same is true for large urban agglomerations. Most large cities are formed by a number of independent local governments, sometimes with a metropolitan authority that has some functions spanning the whole metropolitan agglomeration and seeking to coordinate some policies among all the local governments. Within the local governments that make up these metropolitan areas, there are often very large differentials in the scale of need and in the capacity of local government to address these. So here too there is a need for improved governance in metropolitan areas and for higher levels of government to support the local governments where unmet needs are concentrated.

But in all nations with the highest life expectancies (and relatively small differentials in this within their national populations), the increasing competence and capacity of local governments have been a key contributors. For instance, in high-income and some upper-middle income nations, there is close to universal provision for (for instance) primary and secondary schools, health care, water of drinking quality piped to the home, toilets within each

home, emergency services, drainage.... Although the share of these that comes under the jurisdiction of local governments vary from nation to nation (and within nations over time), in all these nations, local governments have been the level of government through which much of this has been realized. For instance, more than 70% of public investment in OECD countries is undertaken by sub-national governments. This also means that government accountability to citizens and civil society for their provision is largely through local government. In most high-income nations, many measures have been taken to address gender-based inequalities in, for instance, access to income earning opportunities, credit, housing and education.

Thus, the interest of this paper is the role of local government in reducing inequalities in key aspects of sustainable development – as the provider of infrastructure, the provider or manager of a range of services, and the implementer of many regulations and other measures linked to health, economic opportunity and risk reduction.

National governments are also beginning to recognize the importance of local governments for addressing other sustainable development goals, including those to which they made commitments – for instance for implementing Agenda 21. Local governments can help delink the improvement of living conditions from rising greenhouse gas emissions (for instance through good land-use management and public transport) and help foster changing patterns of behavior and consumption among citizens.

In addition, we have the strong evidence from many nations that competent, accountable local governments have had central roles in reducing inequalities in health, education, living conditions, giving voice to the poor and most vulnerable, particularly promoting gender equality, and much else too. These achievements are often obscured by the discussion on inequality focusing on income-inequality and by the discussion on governance focusing on national governments.

The growing interest in addressing inequality

The issue of inequality is one among nine thematic consultations identified as having particular importance to the debates about what will replace the MDGs after 2015 (the date set for the achievement of most of its goals and targets). The other eight are population, health, education, growth & employment, conflict & fragility, governance, environmental sustainability and food security and nutrition.

But a consideration of inequality is also central to addressing the other themes - as in inequalities in health (and in what contributes to good health), in access to education, employment (and the benefits of economic growth) and food security (and nutrition). There are also inequality issues in regard to population (including who influences decisions about family size and who gets the needed sexual and reproductive health services), who benefits from a just rule of law (and has protection from violence and conflict) and who has voice and influence within governance systems.

In all these inequalities, it is usually particular groups that face the greatest disadvantages – for instance a range of gender-based inequalities are evident as women face discrimination in access to income-earning opportunities, education, housing, rule of law and participation in local governance. The residents of informal settlements often face discrimination in access to services and employment

Inequality is also a central issue in regard to environmental sustainability in that higher income groups with high consumption lifestyles contribute disproportionately to global greenhouse gas emissions and to other aspects of environmental damage or degradation.

A focus on income-inequalities would certainly bring in some discussion of the roles and responsibilities for local governments but it is when a consideration of inequalities is extended to these other aspects that the importance of local government and its interaction with citizens and civil society organizations comes to the fore. Inequality can be viewed in social terms (for instance the income inequality within the national population) or in spatial or territorial terms (for instance the differences in the proportion of the population in each locality lacking decent work or basic services or access to public goods such as culture). Many aspects of inequality require national governments to support local (territorially based) policies that actively address them – for instance addressing deficits in provision for basic services and public goods. Local governments at the level of the municipality (and often below this level) become the means by which national policies address these deficits – and address other aspects of poverty in areas where inadequate incomes, living conditions and access to services are most evident.

Beyond recognizing the importance of sub-national levels of government for reducing many aspects of inequality, generalizations about the role of local governments are not possible. There is too much variation in the structure of governments (from national government to the lowest-level of local government) and in the allocation of responsibilities, roles and resources.

The scale and nature of inequality within an urbanizing world

As noted above, 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 half a city's population (and usually a higher proportion of its workforce). It is within these settlements that so many aspects of inequality become evident – in provision for basic services and for infrastructure, in housing quality and in health. Tables 1, 2 and 3 highlight the scale of the inequalities in housing conditions, provision for infrastructure and services and in health outcomes between the worst and the best performing settlements among the world's 3.5 billion urban dwellers. The discussion with these tables is also around the role of local governments in addressing these and in being accountable to their populations, especially those that live in the worst performing settlements. Even if it is not possible to generalize about local government roles and responsibilities in these, all local governments in urban areas have strong influences on the quality of housing, infrastructure and services and on the levels of inequality for these within their jurisdiction. As such, they are also the level of government with which those with unmet

needs must interact. Of course, as discussed above, their capacity to act depends on support from national government – and on national government helping to address the inequalities in housing, infrastructure and service provision between local governments and inequalities in their capacities to address these. Local government willingness to address most forms of inequality will also be influenced by the strength and organization of those suffering inequality. But while keeping these key roles for national government and for civil society in mind, the discussion below focuses on local government roles – in meeting the MDGs, in providing the institutional base for new goals and targets and for ensuring that low-income or otherwise disadvantaged groups get the future that they want.

Table 2: The range of inequalities in housing and infrastructure between the worst and best performing settlements

	Worst performing settlements	Best performing settlements
Quality of house	Poor quality materials, often made of flammable materials and waste materials. Dirt floors. Poor ventilation. Often damp.	Good quality safe home meeting official regulations for health and structural safety
Size of house	Very small; often one small room per household and there can be less than 1 square meter per person	20-50 square meters per person; no need for children to have shared bedrooms.
Provision for water	No safe water supply within easy access; often high prices paid for water from vendors, kiosks or tankers. Also time burden queuing, fetching and carrying.	Water of drinking quality piped to kitchens, bathrooms and toilets 24 hours a day
Provision for sanitation	No toilet in the home (or limited access for tenants) and often no public or community toilet that is accessible and clean	At least one high quality easily cleaned toilet per household with provision for hand washing
Provision for solid waste collection	No collection	Regular collection
Provision for drainage	Not served by storm drainage system	Protected from floods by comprehensive storm drainage system
Provision for clean energy	No electricity and reliance on dirty fuels (including wastes). Often means high levels of indoor air pollution; women	Electricity available 24 hours a day; clean fuels for cooking and where needed heating

	and young children often with much greater exposure to these	
Provision for public space including that for children’s play and for sport and recreation	None	Good range of safe and varied provision within walking distance
Availability of loans to support buying or building better quality housing	None	Loans available
Tenure	Insecure tenure of home (usually as tenant) or land on which it is built; constant threat of eviction	Secure home; protection from forced eviction
Location of housing or settlement	Precarious sites often at high risk of landslides or located on floodplains or other areas at risk from flooding. High risk of fire from very dense settlements of flammable materials.	Safe houses on safe sites

In urban settings, local governments can influence the proportion of their population in the ‘best performing’ and ‘worst performing’ settlements in regard to housing conditions and provision for infrastructure. Many local governments have greatly reduced inequalities in most of the aspects listed above through upgrading programmes in informal settlements, through expanding water, sewerage and drainage networks and through expanding or improving provision for solid-waste collection and management. Local government’s influence the size and quality of housing within their jurisdiction – for instance through their influence on the prices and availabilities of land for housing and on the cost of housing. Local government is usually responsible for applying building codes and planning norms, and often for setting or adjusting these, although in low- and most middle-income nations, they often lack the capacities to do so. In Windhoek (Namibia), a reduction in the minimum plot size for housing and the official acceptance of incremental infrastructure provision lowered land-for-housing costs and allowed a higher proportion of low-income groups to afford legal housing (Mitlin and Muller 2004). Local governments influence provision for public space (parks, playgrounds, plazas...) and its management.

Table 3: The range of inequalities in service provision between the worst and best performing settlements

	Worst performing settlements	Best performing settlements

Provision for schools	No or very inadequate public provision. For the rule of law, this includes no secure policing providing the rule of law in the settlements where they live. This may also mean high levels of violence.	Full public provision for all these services (and with sufficient income to purchase private provision if needed)
Provision for health care		
Provision for specialist health care services and outreach for infants, children, the elderly and those with disabilities - and for sexual and reproductive health		
Provision for emergency services – fire protection, ambulances, para-medics....		
Provision for safety nets		
Provision for the rule of law		
Provision for public transport	No public provision	Good quality provision
Provision for disaster preparedness	None	Effective early warning systems that reach all those at risk and provisions to support actions that need to be taken (eg. temporary move)
Provision for voice	Where there are elections, unable to get onto the voter's register. No means to hold politicians or civil servants or public service provision agencies to account	On voter's register & with political influence. Also channels for complaints if needed – local or national politicians, courts, ombudsmen.....

In urban settings, local governments influence the proportion of their population in the 'best performing' and 'worst performing' settlements in regard to the provision of services listed above. In wealthier and well-governed cities and smaller urban centers, most or all low-income groups enjoy the levels of service provision listed under the best performing settlements. In addition, local governments had key roles in demonstrating how universal provision for basic services (and infrastructure) was possible – although it depended on national governments responding to these and setting up systems to support all local governments, especially those in areas with less prosperity.

Local government is usually the provider of some of these and influences provision for the others. Responsibilities are often shared with national (or state/provincial) governments (e.g. for health care, schools, disaster response, policing). Some emergency services are usually within local government (e.g. fire services, ambulances). For 'public' services that are provided

by private enterprises, it is usually local government that sets the terms, manages the contract (and which enterprise gets the contract) supervises provision.

Table 4: The range of inequalities in some health outcomes between the worst and best performing settlements

	Worst performing settlements	Best performing settlements
Health outcomes		
Infant mortality rates	Over 120/1000 live births	Under 3
Under five mortality rates	Over 250/1000 live births	Under 5
Maternal mortality rates	Over 1,500/100,000 live births?	Under 10
Life expectancy at birth	Under 20 years ²	Over 85 years
Prevalence of diarrhoea with blood in children	13+%	0?
% of children under five who are underweight or under height for their age	Over half	0?

Table 4 highlights the scale of the inequality within the worst and best performing settlements in key health outcomes – infant, under-five and maternal mortality rates, life expectancy at birth, prevalence of serious diarrhoeal diseases among children and child nutrition. The scale and nature of such inequalities are so much linked to the extent of provision for infrastructure and services as noted in Tables 1 and 2. There are few studies of the scale of such inequalities within cities – although the path breaking study of this within Nairobi (including the informal settlements where half the population live) shows the very high infant and under five mortality rates and prevalence of serious diarrhoeal diseases within children (APHRC 2002). There are also a growing number of studies showing the high levels of inequality in health outcomes between low and high income groups in cities or within national urban populations (see Sverdlik 2011 for a review of these).

Reviewing local government innovations in reducing inequality

If we review the plans and programmes of innovative city or municipal governments, their programmes and initiatives to address different aspects of inequality within their jurisdiction go beyond what is discussed above. For instance, city governments with a commitment to health

² Life expectancy at birth is reported to be below 40 years for some cities in sub-Saharan Africa; it is likely that among low-income groups in these cities, it may be 20 years or less.

often have programmes that promote access to affordable and good quality housing, opportunities for social cohesion and social support networks, access to job opportunities and access to high quality educational, cultural, recreational, commercial, health and outdoor provision (see Ibañez 2011 discussing this for the city for which he is the mayor). The current and previous mayor of the city of Rosario in Argentina are well known for a range of measures that have reduced inequality within the city including a decentralization of service provision, a municipal health care system and much increased provision for parks and other forms of public space (Almansi 2009). The city of Manizales in Colombia is well known for its innovative environmental policies for two decades – and this has included a commitment to improving housing conditions for low-income groups, reducing disaster risk, increasing public space and a public monitoring system (‘the environmental traffic lights’) that displays environmental conditions in the city’s different neighbourhoods (Velasquez 1998, 2005). Several of the mayors for the city of Bogota over the last 20 years have had innovative policies to reduce inequalities in access to services, improve security and to promote greater civic participation (Gilbert and Davila 2002).

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 or 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 have taken measures to be more accountable to citizens, often encouraged by civil society – for instance the use of citizen report cards for monitoring the quality of service provision. Participatory budgeting is a way both of making their decisions and actions more accountable to their citizens, and of allowing residents in each neighbourhood to influence priorities in public investments (Cabannes 2004, forthcoming). An increasing number of city governments are addressing disaster risk reduction within their boundaries which so often means working with residents of informal settlements to upgrade their housing and infrastructure (UNISDR 2012). 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. All these programmes directly or indirectly address one of the most profound aspects of inequality – the discrimination faced by those living in ‘slums’ or informal settlements in all the above. For instance, the mayor of the city of Iloilo in the Philippines has a strong partnership with the Homeless People’s Federation of the Philippines, helping house or rehouse those whose homes were damaged or destroyed by floods and working on disaster prevention (Carcellar et al 2011). Many city governments in Asia contribute to the Community Development Funds set up in their city by savings groups formed by residents of informal settlements to fund improvements in infrastructure and services (Boonyabanha and Mitlin 2012).

But one key reason why inequality has been neglected is the lack of data on most of its aspects. The data that governments and international agencies choose to collect obviously influences

what they choose to focus on. 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. It also means no data that is useful for each local government in identifying inequality within their jurisdiction and where it is concentrated. Census data should overcome this problem, even if new data are only available every ten years – but national census bureau often do not provide census data to local governments in a form that allows them to identify the inequalities in (for instance) housing conditions and access to services.

Conclusions

This paper has made evident the key role of local governments in urban areas in reducing a large range of the most fundamental inequalities within their jurisdiction – inequalities in access to services, to infrastructure, to the rule of law and to citizens being able to hold government agencies to account. Of course, the local governments that have been most successful at this are generally in nations where national and all levels of sub-national governments work together on this and where metropolitan city and municipal governments have the responsibilities and capacities to address inequality.

One important reason for widening the discussion and measurement of inequality beyond incomes or assets is that governments and international agencies have far more scope to reduce most other inequalities – for instance in the quality of housing and the quality of provision for water, sanitation, drainage, health care, schools, emergency services and energy sources. Also in the rule of law and in voice and the accountability of governments to all their citizens. Although the role of local governments in these vary, in all nations they have key roles in provision and in the framework within which other providers operate. So this means a capacity to address a range of inequalities.

Addressing these inequalities should also advance many aspects of gender equality, although reducing inequalities needs a gendered-lens to ensure that women's strategic and practical needs are understood and addressed. Here, greater gender equality, greater equality in opportunities and living conditions and sustainable development are intrinsically linked. These linkages cut across the social, economic, environmental and governance dimensions of sustainable development. Initiatives that engage women as full stakeholders have proven to enhance sustainable livelihoods of local communities and national economies.

High-income nations and many upper-middle income nations have greatly reduced inequality in relation to most of these. For instance, the proportion of urban households that have to rely on public standpipes or wells or water vendors or kiosks for water and that have no toilet in their home often represents 20-80 per cent in low and middle income nations but is very low in high-income and many middle-income nations. Similarly, the proportion of urban dwellers living in buildings that do not meet building standards and where occupation of the land or its development is illegal is 20-70 per cent in many cities in low and middle income nations and

very low in high-income nations. In most high-income nations, almost every urban dweller has access to schools, health care and emergency services (even if some groups may face poor quality in these); in most low- and middle-income nations, this is not so.

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 – and many cities continue to grow rapidly. It is also particularly urgent in the Asian nations that are urbanizing rapidly – and beyond the capacities of their local governments to manage this. UN projections suggest that almost all the growth 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) has very large implications for whether inequality is reduced and sustainable development achieved.

The discussions of how to address these fundamental aspects of inequality need to involve local governments both because of the responsibilities they hold for addressing these and because of the large body of evidence to show how effective they can be in this. Especially when supported by national governments.

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