# Policies, Politics and Social Mobilisations that Transform Urban Substandard Settlements.

# Insights from Brazil, India, South Africa and Peru

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Work Package 3 (WP3) under the EU FP7 funded project "Urban Chances – City Growth and The Sustainability Challenge" (Chance2Sustain) was titled: "Policies and politics to address urban inequality: poor people networks, CSO networks and campaigns on sub-standard settlements in metropolitan areas". The main research questions were:

- Which have been the *main public policies* relevant to urban inequalities, segregation, settlement upgrading and services?

- Social mobilisation: Which have been the main contested issues catalysing social mobilisation in the case studies? What have been the
  - formal/informal tactics used
  - strategies for local mobilisation and up-scaling
  - factors of hindrance to an effective mobilisation

- Which have been the *main spaces of engagement* with city-level politics?
  - links with other CSO networks
  - links with metropolitan governance and planning systems

The research team covered six cities in four countries, namely Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, Delhi and Chennai in India, Durban and Cape Town in South Africa, and Lima in Peru.

Studying the policies, politics and social movements/mobilisations that transform urban spaces (sub-standard settlements) across six cities over four years has enabled the research team to develop valuable insights about how the entanglement of politics, policies and practices (as implemented by the state, civil society organisations and communities) shape urban inequality (e.g. see Braathen et al 2013; 2014). The research has illuminated a number of critical issues that matter in addressing urban inequality in the arena of sub-standard housing.

The research approach has revealed how politics and policies are both relational and co-constitutive: politics defines the perceptions of the state of 'something', which then requires or stimulates a response, and this response may be integrated in to or reflected in new policy. Policy then in turn re-shapes politics. It sets new agendas, opens up new

spaces for contestation and includes new social actors, or current social actors in new relations. The mutual relationship between policies and politics is therefore critical to understand and explore if policies and politics are to be transformed so that they can play a role in achieving more equitable and sustainable cities.

## Policies

Our empirical research reveals that there have been some shifts in stated policy towards informal housing or slums from repressive approaches (policies of demolition/eviction) to more progressive and, in some countries more integrated approaches, at least in their initial intentions (e.g. policies of self-help, in-situ upgrading, resettlement and integrated human settlements).

However, the implementation of the new policies, or policy in practice, leaves a lot to be desired in all the countries and cities observed. The 'old' policies of demolition, eviction and the lack of security of tenure continue to remain a threat – or are still implemented. The state in all four countries studied is committed to a pro-growth agenda and hence is strongly influenced by the private sector. Policy may reflect a pro-poor focus, but implementation is shaped by what Harvey (1989) termed entrepreneurial urbanism (with its megaproject emphasis) in all cases.

## Politics

The key to breaking out of 'vicious circles', where urban inequality reproduces a certain type of politics (elitism, clientelism, patronage etc.) which again deepens inequality, lies in the politics itself. Changes can be done by mobilising new actors and new interests into the political system, and as a consequence changing the power relations between the actors and the rules of the game so that the policies are formulated and implemented "with" rather than "against" the urban poor. However, more research is needed to study cases of 'pro-poor' changes of power relations and governance systems and the extent to which these changes can produce new policy outcomes regarding urban inequality.

Our research should therefore be followed up by closer dialogue with works dealing with the agency of the poor, such as Larmer (2010) on social movements, Roy (2011) on subaltern urbanism, and Holston (1995; 2008) and Miraftab and Wills (2005) on insurgent citizenship.

## Social mobilisations

We identified the following broad modalities of social mobilisation among the urban poor: (i) the everyday forms of resistance; (ii) social protest – or confrontational mobilisation; (iii) "judicialisation" – or struggles through the judicial system, and (iv) engagement and partnership. Two other types of situations are also examined: (v) demobilisation and the fragmentation of collective action, and (vi) the absence or low level of mobilisation.

Our settlement studies showed that social mobilisation for issues related to sub-standard settlements remained typically fragmented and localized. Protests by shack/slum dwellers are quickly quelled by the authorities, and their discourses and concrete experiences do not easily find their way into policies and practices.

## Policy implications

The main 'policy' problem related to urban inequality and substandard settlements is the significant (and huge) gap between the principles of the policies (which may be pro-poor and progressive) and their implementation (which may turn against the urban poor's interests). In other words, any well-intended policy-making in this area needs

strong public oversight mechanisms and/or institutionalized people's power to ensure that it is implemented in a manner that reflects its core principles and goals. The legal-judicial system can provide solutions to the policy problem. When sub-standard settlement dwellers' have access to the judiciary, their social mobilisation may result in better account of their interests and rights.

Currently there is no blue print for public interventions to upgrade substandard settlements. This has occurred because the state has recognised: the need to adopt more experimental approaches to governance given the enormity and complexity of the housing challenge in cities; blueprint planning for state housing has failed to deliver integrated human settlements in the past; the need to include other actors in seeking solutions to the housing problem (including the private sector, NGOs and communities) requires a more open approach. By being flexible in its approach the state can manoeuvre around its responsibility of meeting the settlement needs of its citizens as it does not have to commit to a fixed plan with specific outcomes or targets as these remain broad in their scope.

Knowledge has emerged as a critical factor in transforming sub-standard settlement policy. The local state needs strong evidence and knowledge about the people that live in the sub-standard settlements, e.g. through community mapping. It should be mandatory to precede upgrading and other settlement interventions with economic and social impact assessments. When political authorities and private developers intervene in poor and marginalized communities, there is a strong need for improved system of knowledge production that includes all actors and knowledge sharing with the residents of sub-standard settlements. The critical task is to institutionalise participatory procedures, through the establishment and practice of participatory institutions. The challenge is to do so without causing overly bureaucratization and the co-optation of informal settlement leaders.

The pressure on the state to address housing challenges, due to its intensely political nature, results in shifts in policy towards a pro-poor position. However, the capacity of the state and its political will, as well as the power of the private sector in shaping development decisions in cities, undermines this intention often resulting in more exclusionary practices towards those who live in sub-standard settlements. Developing more robust and accountable political systems which ensure greater transference between policy and practice (in both directions) need to be developed if life for those who live in sub-standard settlements is to improve in a meaningful and sustainable manner.

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