

World Urban Forum of UN-Habitat

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CONTENT

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Equal access to the City. A realistic statement?
- 3 Aspects of climate and environment in cities
- 4 Bridging the urban divide in Rio de Janeiro
- 5 Equal access to shelter. With a focus on self-help housing
- 6 Final remarks on social housing issues

1 Introduction

The World Urban Forum is an official congress of the United Nations to be held every two years. Recent experience was in March 2010 in Rio de Janeiro. About 13,700 participants attended the Forum and persons came from most developing and other countries to talk about the problems of the fast urbanizing world, the lack of access to the city by urban poor, the potential and desired solutions, the best practices, etc. The event was prepared by UN-Habitat the UN-Agency for human settlements and the improvement of housing-, living- and working conditions in the developing countries. This organization helps -at least tries to help- the urban poor and its governments (local, metropolitan or national) to transfer the existing cities into healthier and safer areas for all and to build up and put into practice adequate development strategies for urban areas, existent as well as the ones to be developed newly. Not only it would be necessary –generally seen- to create more green spaces in cities, but the carbon-dioxide emissions in cities should be lowered substantially, the air-quality should be improved and other main negative effects of motorised traffic should be eliminated, etc. But positive perspectives of cities are also present: cities are the economic centres and attract many individuals and families looking for better opportunities. Furthermore, cities and urban areas offer profitable opportunities for millions and – theoretically- the access to urban services. This is why the rural-urban migration is still going on, and why many individuals and families are trying to find a better life in cities. Most rural-urban migrants are happy with their choice for the city, although their conditions can be characterised often as very minimal. This is why UN-Habitat is focusing on the ‘right to the city’ and better access to work, infrastructure and urban services, education and above all: a decent house in the city or urban area.

2 Equal access to the city. A realistic statement?

The UN-Habitat’s themes of Rio de Janeiro are linked with the main urban problems and the expectations for the cities of the future: an illustration: (see for example: The State of the World’s Cities 2006/2007):

- In 1950 around one third of the world’s population lived in cities; of all 4 billion people of that time: 1.5 billion were urban people; of which in urban slums: 0.5 billion.
- In 2008 around half of the world’s population lives in cities; of all 6 billion people of that time: 3 billion were urban people; of which in urban slums: 1 billion.
- In 2050 around two third of the world’s population will be living in cities; of all 9 billion people or even more; 6 billion will be urban people; of which in urban slums: 1.8 billion (30%), if no extra measures are taken.

Just to illustrate how serious the population growth really is, the following: the world’s population grows every year with 80 – 100 million people, the population of whole Germany and even more. This growth will happen every year during the next 20 – 30 years. The actual mission of UN-Habitat is especially to focus the people’s mind on the right on urban living space and work, also for the urban poor. Moreover: the fact that there is an urban divide is evident: on the one hand rich people can afford the luxury being present in most cities, and on the other hand the urban poor offering their low-cost services to the others, while living under poor conditions at the city’s fringes, not being able

to make use of the urban prosperity. This is only a short description of what the urban divide really is.

The general idea is that measures must be taken to bridge the urban divide; that poor urbanites will be able to live in the city and can make use of all services there, especially: the access to work, income and education. The important role of women is being recognized too; their position is generally seen weak and should be improved. Summarizing the central theme of the WUF 2010: one must think of 'the right to the city', and: the right to a decent dwelling, the right to a piece of land to build on, the right to a good quality rental dwelling and the right to a decent job, etc. Moreover: participation with public decision-making is a key-concept at all levels. The 5th World Urban forum has stipulated all these items, but making it all executable is another thing.

Summary of the mega-trends:

- The world's population keeps on growing, especially in the developing countries.
- The growth of the world's population (births minus deaths) means an increase of (poor) people, especially in an urban ambience.
- Cities will grow substantially and there will be a need for new cities. As a consequence, the population in the urban slums will grow, unless one could find new effective measures combating slums (at the scale required).
- There is a problem with the world's climate and a problem with the supply of energy; the contribution of the cities to these problems are huge (an estimated 60%).
- The housing production cannot follow the population growth, while millions of families are not able to pay for the construction or the betterment of a (decent) house.
- The national governments and the local governments have -generally seen- insufficient knowledge and financial means for the guidance of the urban growth, e.g. with (strategic) planning and government assistance.

Comments:

The foreseen growth of the cities of the future and the existing urban slums are already very alarming. The main questions are: 1) are the cities capable of managing all these problems? 2) are local and metropolitan governments able to develop and structuralize the cities seen all the problems? 3) would it be thinkable that cities will be developed as polycentric urban areas, with different sub-centers at various levels of servicing, for a better spread of services and work over cities and urban agglomerations?

The statement 'Equal access to the City' must be seen as a long term objective, however, seen the enormous existent problems of cities not easily executable. A differentiated approach on the cities of the future, with polycentric structures, higher densities, economical land-use, green sub-structures, overall water supply and waste water treatment, will be the challenges for planning and managing the cities of the future.

3 Aspects of climate and environment in cities

Besides the right to the city, the themes climate change, natural environment and social environment have been discussed in a variety of meetings and events. The carbon-dioxide emissions

that cities produce are enormous and the (foreseen) growth of cities is a challenge for us all: how to neutralize the emissions of existing cities and how to control the emissions of new cities and urban expansions? These are important questions.

The city of Lima –as an example- is located in a narrow strip of land located in a desert-like area between the Pacific Ocean and the Andes mountains. The climate is already dry and it almost never rains there. The melting of the glaciers in the Andes mountains lowers the delivery of water to the rivers and the drinking water problem in the coastal cities will increase eventually.



The desert-like area north of Lima, where the urban expansion plan of Nuevo Pachacútec is being realized.

In the area around the Sahara desert in Africa the rainfall is decreasing too, at least in a number of countries. As a consequence, the deserts are expanding, which causes for instance the need for migration from rural to urban.

These examples indicate that there will be big consequences for the world and its cities; many cities in Africa will become dryer and will have more problems with the provision of drinking water, while the population pressure on these cities increases. Some people expect great problems, even catastrophes for the cities south of the Sahara. Climate changes bring along new problems here, but also these cities should reduce its carbon-dioxide emissions. What does this all mean? One can discuss it, but what counts are the concrete measures that can be taken. Large-scale solutions with solar-energy for cities might be possible theoretically, but large investments must be done and the concerning governments are not able to provide those. Moreover, public transport systems in cities of the South are mostly weak and most traffic systems are not sustainable; most vehicles are old and produce exhaust gases and noise nuisance, while bad air quality is quite common.

In general terms: the quality of cities must be improved strongly: e.g.: more green spaces and trees in streets, more playgrounds for children, less nuisance from motorized traffic and more attention for the solving of all other environmental problems. Additionally, the making of harmonious cities is another target; bridging the urban divide is a necessity socially seen. The question is how all this could be realized and how much time it would cost to make the cities more environmentally (physically and socially) acceptable living spaces. Another question emerges: do we have enough time to solve the urban problems, while the cities are growing so fast? The social divide is closely connected to the urban poverty, which only can be solved through the creation of work/labour, better opportunities for new generations, better education and trainings.

Women are normally stabilizing factors in a family and a community. Men often run away with the consequence that there are many broken (or one parent) families. However, generally seen, women do not have the power in local politics, in neighbourhoods or in housing cooperatives. But women can always give crucial input for the functioning of neighbourhoods, community based organizations and cooperatives and it is essential that politicians and planners listen carefully to them. Women's organizations want to change the limited power of women in decision making processes and stipulate that the city is for everyone and must be a safe place for their children. The input of women on 'making the local community work' cannot be missed. It should be a challenge for urban planners and housing specialists to implement the women's knowledge and cooperation at all levels.

In order to prevent that the urban planning does not match with the needs of the residents, expressly also the women's needs, there must be done a lot on participative planning. In many municipalities one can find new local tools of planning and managing of the city, e.g. with participative budgeting at the city level and participative planning at the neighbourhood level, and the consultation of residents with development plans, housing policy, etc. But, the participation of residents with house construction and all aspects of real life in the housing environment is another thing. Pilot projects have been executed, but the problem is that planners are technocrats and politicians want to gain popularity on the short term.

The World Urban Forum underlines the right to the city, the right to a decent urban dwelling and the right to education and trainings for all segments/groups of society. Brazil even states that there is the right on land to build on, and the right to obtain subsidy for decent housing. All this is connected to the human rights; but the underlining of human rights alone does not bridge the urban divide. A clear vision on the city of the future and concrete measures must be defined in order to be able to create adequate solutions that really help. The planning of the provision of sufficient land for housing programmes in a country would help, but one must be aware of housing standards, housing typologies, urban densities, construction costs and other related items.

Comments

Land for housing programmes (for urban expansions and for urban renovations and densifications) will be necessary almost everywhere and national and local governments must be involved. Adequate legislation on land property and public purchase of land for social housing and other necessary urban functions and services are needed, while the installment of funds –national, metropolitan or municipal- would be of great importance. However, those funds are not available everywhere. If public bodies are not able to purchase sufficient land for social housing, the involvement of private parties should be considered. The involvement of private funds for urban development should be explored in order to obtain sufficient investments for urban development. The governments might find solutions to guarantee private investments. Generating sufficient public and private investments and the development of public-private cooperation that works adequately, is one of the challenges for the near urban future.

Besides the urban divide within the cities in the South, there is a huge divide between the North and the South. Some speakers connected the urban divide in the South to the divide between the North and the South and mentioned that the cities in the North have also 'islands of poverty'. If the worldwide divide will not be solved, the migration towards the North will continue. Moreover, some speakers have stipulated the importance of municipal participatory tools and have given information on community based organizations that will participate in decision-making and also on the growth of the cooperative movement. Decision-making processes are preferably more and more participative, and bottom-up planning is better than top-down planning.

Urban poverty is in all cases the greatest problem of all and therefore the needed urban development must be coupled with programmes combating the urban poverty; which requires a master plan for every country and every municipality. It is too easy to define the urban problems in terms of lack of education and skills, knowing that urban prosperity is being delivered by the millions of urban poor that provide work, like personal servicing, technical servicing, etc., that is low-cost for the user. The big question is: how to bridge the divide between the rich and the many that earn only a little, although they work very hard. This is a crucial political issue in every country.

4 Bridging the urban divide in Rio De Janeiro

To better understand the urban divide, we look at some aspects of urbanized Rio de Janeiro, with its 6 million inhabitants. 20% of them live in the *favelas*, the urban slums at the fringes of the city, which is 1.2 million. The metropolitan area of Rio is even bigger and one can count 13 million residents there. In the municipality of Rio de Janeiro around 12% of the people does not have connections to water networks and 30% does not have official electricity connections. The majority of the people in the *favelas* have no access to basic services; the people use illegal connections to the electricity network while human waste and waste from the households is being dumped in the rivers, etc. Living conditions are bad: there is much violence and the public domain is being dominated by street gangs. The police are trying to control the neighbourhoods but this works only temporarily. The municipality of Rio is executing an ambitious slum improvement programme.

An excursion to one of the *favelas* (March, 26, 2010) has made clear that the municipality of Rio can and will play an important role with the guidance of the self-help housing; if streets are being paved and sewerage systems are being realized, the residents will eventually invest more in the improvement of their dwellings. The municipality is sometimes providing technical assistance for self-builders. When local leaders with a vision for the future of neighbourhoods or building blocks/streets play an active role, and can count on grassroots support, positive results can be reached. The municipality should find these 'power of the people movement' and help them, by giving support, which makes really a big difference. The rich parts of the city are built on flat lands and all are occupied with high quality buildings (high-rise apartments, flats, etc.). The poor build their dwellings e.g. at the slopes of the hills that surround the flat urbanized lands; constructing a house there is difficult; one must make terraces before constructing the house. This must be done carefully, because when heavy rains are falling, the erosion of the area can be a big problem and land-slides will occur (see photos below).



The favelas of Rio de Janeiro. The confrontation of high-rise buildings and self-help housing at the slopes of the mountains are also to be seen in the City center (e.g. in Copacabana)(right)



Photos of Rio de Janeiro favelas. The photo right-below (taken from the press) is from the land-slide of Aril, 6th 2010.

The role of the municipality concerning the urban slums and the housing assignment there can be: the giving of support to community based organizations and small groups of families being united (save and build groups, housing cooperatives, etc.) Furthermore, technical assistance could be given through the establishment of building advisory teams in the *favelas*, an idea developed and presented by Nabil Bonduki (see below).

Comments:

Would it be possible to bridge the urban divide in Rio de Janeiro? This is an actual question; however, the land for housing problem will be the most difficult to solve. One can encounter two different worlds, with two different 'legal' systems. Two weeks after the World Urban Forum heavy rainfalls effected Rio de Janeiro and as a result of landslides at least 200 people were killed, mostly in the poor neighbourhoods. The public life in the city was stopped during days.

5 Equal access to shelter. With a focus on self-help housing

The housing issues at the World Urban Forum were scattered over a variety of events. Below one finds a compilation of housing related events and leading speakers.

Mr. Claudio Acioly

Claudio Acioly joined the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) in March 2008 and is currently its chief Housing Policy Section. He is the coordinator of the dialogue 3 of the fifth World Urban Forum. He has 27 years of experience and has worked in more than 20 countries as practitioner, technical advisor, development consultant and training and capacity building expert prior to joining UN-HABITAT. He is one of the leading figures on housing issues.

Mr. Nabil Bonduki

According to Mr. Nabil Bonduki's analyses (scholar, housing practitioner and advisor on national housing policy and the national housing plan of Brazil), a new approach on national housing policy in Brazil can be found:

1. The growing housing needs in Brazil are recently newly calculated.
2. The low-income population is not able to pay the costs of housing.
3. The subsidies are insufficient for all (which was calculated for the period 2008-2023). The number of persons per family is increasing too; calculations show that until 2023 an additional number of 30 million dwellings are necessary.
4. The current housing production model creates exclusion: the public sector is only capable of producing 14% of the demand and the market is doing 7%. Self-help housing is the largest segment (65%).
5. Densification of the housing solutions as a function of the urban context are at stake. In different urban contexts: subsidies for urbanized land are needed. Diversities in forms of housing products too.
6. Subsidy of the urbanized land in the city will be: 'the Right to the City Subsidy'.
7. Free technical support services, this is one of the proposals; besides that: municipal planning, infrastructures, the right on the land.
8. Support to the self-managed housing, with many examples, also in high-rise constructions. (self-help housing within frameworks realized by construction companies).
9. Self-help and mutual aid: the government of Brazil is going to deliver and stimulate this.

The new housing policy of Brazil can be seen as a realistic housing policy for the future, which however must be proven as executable.

Mr. Reinhart Goethert

Incremental Housing according to Reinhard Goethert, MIT, USA is the best thinkable housing delivery system in the developing world. He provides an urban pro-active strategy to meet the growth challenges of the next 20 years. University Consortium on Incremental Housing (MIT/SIGUS/USA) stipulates that Incremental Construction is clearly one of the most important housing delivery systems in the developing world. They call it 'Incremental Housing', step by step and by the household's own means; which is actually (more or less) the same as 'self-help housing'.

He provides a series of self-help housing practices in various countries. According to Mr. Reinhard the self-help housing movement of John Turner was evaluated too soon (after 2-3 years).

General examples: by Patrick Wakely; sites-and-services/core housing/examples, also high densities.

Chili: by Margarita Greene

Brazil: by Andrea Mussi en Benamy Turkienicz. Government provides normally housing finance to construction companies, but dominating practice is incremental housing.

México (1): by Isabel Vargas Mata: Colonia Rubén Jaramillo

Informal settlements in Mexico. Community work. Problems with landownership (*ejidos*)

Mexico (2): by Benjamin Guerra

Mexican government develops policy concerning incremental housing (Chihuahua).

Kenya: by Tom Anyamba.

In Nairobi is Dandora an old Sites & Services Project (help from World bank). 6.000 plots Umoja Core Housing. Momentarily most houses have more than one family.

Sudan: by Gamal Hamid (Khartoum)

Sites en Services Plans were quite easy; land was governmental (98%). Social services through self-help. Mostly: Sites without Services. In Sudan housing is 100% self-help.

Turkey: by Aytanga Dener

Istanbul, gececondus. Nu 2.000.000 squatter settlements in Istanbul and in 40 other cities.

Thailand: by Wijitbusaba Ann Marome en Supreedee Rittironk

Incremental Housing Experience.

Poland: by Lech Klosiewicz

Mr. Johnny Åstrand

Lund University has a long history with helping people from developing countries with housing issues. Self-help housing is an effective tool for poverty alleviation (Mario Rodriguez) Nicaragua/Costa Rica. They mention various types of self-help housing: 1) Self-help housing without formal help, 2) Assisted self-help housing, 3) Assisted self-help housing and mutual aid.

Ecuador: by Paula Siclari.

Community work on 'mingas'. Cooperación Hohar de Cristo. 'Hogar de Nazaret'. Legal issues.

Ecuador: by Ivette Arrollo.

Guayaquil.

Mr. Daniel Smith

Housing Finance Construction, being offered by the Affordable Housing Institute: 'housing is the key to improving cities'. Mission Entrepreneurial Entities (shortly called MEE's) are keys to improving houses. Starting points: economical capital creates social outcomes, and: political demand creates political commitment. The start is made by seed-capital. They (the MEE's) need donors just as building needs scaffolding. The commercial sector comes last and the donor-group can go away at the end (they get back the money). MEE's are essential partners in Social Housing.

Mr. Gustavo Gonzalez Soto

Gustavo González Soto is a Uruguayan housing cooperative campaigner. He is a teacher by profession and since 1976 he is associated with the housing cooperative for mutual aid movement of Uruguay. He has been an active member and leading personality of the FUCVAM (Uruguayan

Federation of Housing Cooperatives and Mutual Aid) occupying its executive secretariat and presidency for different periods. He is founder of the FUCVAM Training Centre and co-founder of the SELVIP (Latin American Secretariat of Public Housing). For many years Gustavo has been actively participating in the Latin American and global conferences and General Assemblies of HIC (Habitat International Coalition). He is also a member of the Housing Advisory Commission for the Municipal Housing Program of the Municipality of Montevideo (1990) and has partnered with the National Housing Union Movement of Brazil in promoting cooperative models in Brazil and other countries of Latin America. He has specialised in organising exchanges and internships among social urban movements and housing cooperative organizations of Latin America.

Promesha presentation

Promesha is an initiative of Lund University Sweden; it is a programme for capacity and policy development through institutional cooperation on improving low-income housing. The programme activities include international, national and regional courses/workshops, housing policy seminars, research, studies and evaluations, publications and institutional strengthening. Implementation of activities is done in collaboration with national partners in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Peru.

HIC presentation

Habitat International Coalition (HIC) has presented a new book during the World Urban forum, entitled: 'Cities for All Now'. In this book the right to the city is presented; they try to combat liberalism and capitalism with concrete measures, so there is an 'island of hope'. New urban structures must be made while cooperation is the new credo; one is trying to fight for the interests of the forgotten residents of cities. They stipulated that there is a slum-act in South Africa. Many people are doing things on one's own accord and they force the government to cooperate; this is an example of bottom-up initiatives. Governments should be aware of these local powers and try to support these effectively.

ISOCARP presentation

The International Society of City and Regional Planners organised an event at the WUF and presented the UPAT's, the Urban Planning Advisory Teams. The work of the ISOCARP was mentioned as important in the Annual Report of UN-Habitat: (page 18): *With "Low carbon cities" as the theme, speakers at the 2009 congress of the ISOCARP recognized that urban areas were major sources of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as critical potential contributors to any global action plan on climate change that would necessarily call for widely different solutions across different conurbations. And: This particular aspect of sustainable urban planning will come under sharper focus in September 2010, when the next congress convenes in Nairobi, Kenya, with "Sustainable city – developing world" as its chosen topic.*

Comments:

Equal access to shelter is a justified target, but one must be aware of realistic goals on the short term. Besides the planning and preparing of urban expansion plans (related to land for housing programmes), the integrated slum improvement must be continued strongly. The neighbourhood improvement programmes are not working sufficiently (the Kampung improvement programmes

executed in Indonesia with the initial help of the World Bank are good examples, but any assistance for self-help housing was missing there). The technical assistance method that is given for social housing and self-builders in Uruguay and the support for the cooperative movement on social housing in this country, is something to be promoted more. The idea of giving technical support (advisory bureaus) to self-builders at the site in Brazilian favelas and new urban expansion plans are very promising. Adequate research should bring the results to the international agenda. The aspect of the urban densities and urban land-use should be attended also. 'Equal access to housing' means also the need for a adequate land-administration. There is the following chain: mapping, urban planning, security of tenure, cadastral services, valuation, financial sources. There might be installed more funds for the support of the urban poor (Mr. Dan Ericsson, State secretary and deputy Minister of Finance, Sweden). All kind of aspects of sustainable development were not included in Rio's WUF. Nevertheless: developing sustainable cities will be very necessary and there is a lot of work to be done.

6 Final remarks on social housing issues

Actual UN-Habitat's focus is to improve the access to urban services and urban work for the urban poor. However, the statement that the city is insufficiently accessible to the urban poor seems to be a little painless. Many big cities can suffer from ongoing migration and cannot bear more in-migrants. Large cities and metropolises get jammed, air-quality can be very low and many have a lot of trouble with noise from motorized traffic. As a consequence, it does not seem to be logical to give better access to cities for the urban poor. It might be better to improve the cities, to maintain the existing smaller ones, and to promote differentiated cities with better living conditions and more urban sub-centers at various levels. In the meantime it is clear that the urban poor requires safe housing- and living conditions, elementary schools, shops, health-centers in the direct environment of the dwelling, while heads of households would like to have steady jobs at a short distance of the house. Moreover, they would like to have a safe environment for their children, and some space for elderly people. Services as cinemas, theaters, etc., are never wanted in the first place. This is why a new urban focus with a differentiation of the urban landscape might be useful: big cities and metropolises might have more sub-centers at various levels (services, work and leisure). The accessibility of work and income could be a following approach, knowing that a better planning of urban services could work. Accessibility of work and income for all, might be a next theme.

Additional approaches might be focused on the improvement of the existent urban neighbourhoods; being mostly located at the fringes of cities; living near the urban centers is commonly too expensive for many. Housing- and living conditions are mostly bad; while heads of households mostly have to travel to city centers for work, which costs them too much time and too much money. But sometimes slums are located within urban agglomerations as 'islands of poverty'. For the time being, already one milliard people worldwide live in slums. When present trends continue and no appropriate measures are taken, the number of people living in urban slums could increase severely. The definition of what a slum is, will be provided and UN-Habitat is developing the five shelter deprivation indicators, in cooperation with the countries involved.

The UN-Habitat's mission is to enlighten the main developments on population growth, the urban developments, the 'state of the cities', and to report on these issues. Investigating the most important qualities of cities, the houses and the housing environments are of outmost importance. This means e.g.: to commission people and organizations to execute research related to the future of cities, the backlogs in housing situations (e.g. housing extends, technical housing qualities, prices of housing products). Moreover, they start pilot-projects, they describe best-practices, while cooperating with national governments, local governments, NGOs, CBOs and research institutes. An annual report is launched every year, such as the present 'State of the World's Cities 2010/2011'.

The cooperation of UN-Habitat with countries can lead toward Country Programmes, sometimes with the help of other United Nations programmes. The Habitat Concept is covering a series of issues concerning, housing, the housing environment, the neighbourhood, labour and income, education, safety in cities, the position of women, health care and many more. Training and capacity building are of vital importance. 'Adequate Housing for All' is a programme of UN-Habitat with three components: 1) Housing sector Reforms, 2) Global Eviction Monitoring and Prevention and 3) Slum Upgrading and Prevention.

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