

HABITAT III NATIONAL REPORTING PROCESSES: LOCATING THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AND THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research aims to provide an examination of some key national reporting processes leading up to the UN's Habitat III conference in 2016. It examines both the content of 4 draft national reports using a framework based on the Right to the City, as well as the processes behind the production of national reports unfolding in 8 countries, measuring the extent to which civil society groups are involved. The analysis took into particular consideration the cross-cutting issues of social diversity, rural-urban linkages as well as legal, policy and planning instruments necessary to operationalize the Right to the City principles. This research emerged from a Habitat International Coalition (HIC) working group created to further understand the Habitat III process and how civil society might engage in it. It has been carried out by the Development Planning Unit (DPU) in collaboration with Habitat International Coalition (HIC).

PROCESS

Countries under investigation: Brazil, Chile, Egypt, Indonesia, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru and South Africa

1. PARTICIPATION IN THE NATIONAL REPORTING PROCESS:

How civil society groups are involved in report production, whether there is a participatory space that respects diverse voices and marginalised groups, whether there is the possibility for civil society to have a meaningful impact on the national report and in decisions related to Habitat III.

FINDINGS: Ranged from completely closed, to government-led consultative meetings, to open forums accompanied by an online platform, to civil society-led alternative report processes. However, most government-led processes were consultative, compromising the opportunity for wider stakeholders to influence decision-making.

3. TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR MUTUAL BENEFIT:

Whether a record is made of meetings and events, whether relevant documents are made easily accessible, and whether the process is accountable to those involved and commitments are followed through.

FINDINGS: Most government-led processes were not very transparent and civil society groups had to pressure governments for information. Some reports and information were easily accessible online. The most transparent example was Brazil with two substantial forums held and an open online platform to document the process.

2. BALANCED CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATION:

Whether there is a diverse representation of civil society members represented in the national reporting process, in terms of social identity, geography, and types of groups.

FINDINGS: Diverse civil society representation was a major challenge. Even in more open forum structures, it was difficult to get a diverse range of groups and social identities. Often not many social movements were present and most processes were weighted towards urban areas and the major cities where events took place.

4. CONTINUAL LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT ON CURRENT PARTICIPATION PROCESSES:

Whether conditions are in place that facilitate meaningful participation of civil society groups, and if there is a willingness to learn and continually improve on current participation practices.

FINDINGS: Many governments have effectively adopted participation jargon but, apart from the Brazil experience, they use this more as a way to legitimise the existing reporting process. Still, there are civil society-led initiatives that are expanding participatory processes, that intend to inform the Habitat III agenda and also spark national and international discussions on the Right to the City.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CLEARER MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK FOR HABITAT II AND HABITAT III:

Generate guidelines and criteria for participatory production of the Habitat Agenda and monitoring strategy, through which relevant actors may be held to account for past and future commitments.

2. A COMMITMENT TO A COHERENT VISION TOWARDS SOCIAL JUSTICE AND URBAN SUSTAINABILITY:

If Habitat III is to be a basis for transformative commitments, it is necessary to collaboratively build criteria for an explicit engagement with the vision of social justice and urban sustainability. Civil society initiatives focused on the Right to the City present an opportunity that could be built upon.

3. A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A VISION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND URBAN SUSTAINABILITY:

Elaborate and disseminate a long-term framework for Habitat III to ensure that institutional structures are in place internationally that will enable the full exercise of Human Right to Habitat.

CONTENT

Countries under investigation: Indonesia, Jamaica, Mexico and South Africa

1. SOCIAL FUNCTION OF LAND AND PROPERTY:

a. Management of land and real estate speculation to ensure redistribution of benefits based on principle of equity: prioritising collective goods over private interests;
b. Recognition of the use value of land and property towards equitable outcomes.

FINDINGS: Not dealt with in a substantive manner in the reports. Occasionally speculation or rises in land value are acknowledged as blocking access to housing, however, often the proposed strategies to address this entail further accommodating market mechanisms, which would lead to the prioritisation of the exchange rather than use value of land and property.

2. RIGHT TO THE SOCIAL PRODUCTION OF HABITAT:

a. Recognition and support of community-led/people-led housing;
b. Right to adequate and secure housing, including the recognition of diverse types of tenure.

FINDINGS: Not substantively addressed, though there are isolated references to community-based housing processes, such as 'autoproduction' in Mexico. The reports mostly emphasise the need for financial schemes to enable the production of and access to housing, focusing on formal and individual ownership, with occasional mention of affordable renting.

3. FULL EXERCISE OF CITIZENSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT OF THE CITY:

a. Right to inclusive participation that takes into account differing abilities and unequal power relations, creating space for the voices of marginalised groups;
b. Right to meaningful participation where constituents are able to affect policy and planning as well as modes of production.

FINDINGS: While the reports seem to agree that there should be more participation in decision-making processes, the term itself is never defined. As a result, the reports end up producing ambiguous statements, where participation is applied mostly as lip service rather than a serious reflection as to how diverse groups can meaningfully participate in the "democratic management of the city".

4. RIGHT TO A JUST ECONOMY:

a. Recognition and valuing of different types of work and economies (e.g., informal, care, and solidarity economy);
b. Redistribution of economic output (e.g. taxation going towards benefits) as well as input (e.g. mode of production), in a manner that absorbs labour and provides decent work.

FINDINGS: The economy is generally interpreted in the reports in a standard market-driven approach, with the city viewed as a driver of economic growth and an occasional nod to inclusiveness and supporting informal economic activities and small businesses. There is not much understanding of or engagement with the solidarity economy sector and collective modes of production that could support equitable outcomes.

5. RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT AND TO EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

a. Reduction of risk (including environmental and physical risk/safety);
b. Protection of the commons, including valuable natural areas and historic/cultural heritage;
c. Equitable management of environmental commons/resources.

FINDINGS: Reports express the need for environmental protection and reflect an understanding of the threat of climate change as well as natural disasters. Though there are some isolated calls for greater community involvement, there is not much mentioned in terms of management of environmental commons and resources, nor an explicit aim to transition towards a sustainable model of urban development.

6. SPATIAL JUSTICE:

a. Equitable distribution of environmental goods, e.g. good quality services and public spaces and equitable prevention of environmental risks and hazards;
b. Right to inclusive public transport and urban mobility;
c. Confronting socio-spatial segregation.

FINDINGS: While there is general recognition of the need for equal access to services and some recognition of persisting socio-spatial segregation, there are not many concrete suggestions elaborated as to how to address these issues.

FINDINGS – PROCESS

"Participation" when initiated by government was mostly in the form of consultative meetings, workshops or forums. Most processes were weighted towards urban areas or capital cities where meetings took place; rural groups were not very represented and it is unlikely that very marginalised groups would have access to these spaces. In addition, reports often seemed to be a heavily "bureaucratised" with political motivations dictating whether energy is spent towards this Habitat agenda or other international agendas. Still, within these conditions civil society groups have initiated certain innovative practices that have involved a wider array of actors and expanded the space for participation.

FINDINGS – CONTENT

The reports often display an understanding and recognition of certain Right to the City principles, however, concrete methods to address associated problems or even clear principles that might be suggested for a "new urban agenda" are not clearly laid out. Some points of the reports also seem to be contradictory, especially between stated needs for more equitable cities on the one hand and the market-driven approach to urban development on the other. In this sense the reports do not present a coherent vision of a more just and sustainable development and are not building substantively on Habitat II commitments.

The **Development Planning Unit**, University College London (UCL), is an international centre specialising in academic teaching, research, training and consultancy in the field of urban and regional development, with a focus on policy, planning, management and design. It is concerned with understanding the multi-faceted and uneven process of contemporary urbanisation, and strengthening more socially just and innovative approaches to policy, planning, management and design, especially in the contexts of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East as well as countries in transition. For more information, see website: <http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/dpu>

Habitat International Coalition. The Habitat International Coalition (HIC) is the global network for rights related to habitat. Through solidarity, networking and support for social movements and organizations, HIC struggles for social justice, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, and works in the defence, promotion and realization of human rights related to housing and land in both rural and urban areas. For more information, see website: <http://www.hic-net.org>

This project was coordinated by Alexandre Apsan Frediani with Rafaella Simas Lima from the Development Planning Unit, in collaboration with the HIC Habitat III Working Group with the support of DPU staff members. To access outputs from this project and other initiatives by HIC Habitat III Working Group, see website: <https://habitat3hic.wordpress.com>

To know more about DPU's engagement with Habitat III, visit website <http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/habitat-III>

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REPORT SUMMARY

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