

MYTH 12: “National governments and international agencies must target their policies so as to reach those most in need in urban areas”

There are two contrasting ways to address urban poverty. One is directed by national governments and international agencies, designed by ‘experts’ drawing on official data and official definitions of ‘who is poor’ and ‘who is in need’ to identify ‘target groups’ and design policies to meet their needs. For most international agencies, these ‘experts’ are drawn primarily from high-income nations. The other way to address urban poverty is to make resources available to respond to and support local democratic processes in which the rights of all citizens to basic services, the rule of law and accountable institutions are stressed. Inevitably, all government policies are influenced in part by experts and in part by citizen pressures - but the tendency in the past has been to favour the expert driven top down approach.

One of the difficulties with expert-led ‘solutions’ is that most experts lack knowledge about the specifics of each city or urban neighbourhood and most also lack engagement with the local population. Foreign experts often cannot speak the language of those living in the settlement where their recommendations will be implemented. Their recommendations are also biased by their experience in other nations or by their reading of other ‘success stories’. It has also become fashionable for ‘best practices’ to be identified, documented and then touted as lessons that can be applied in other locations. What worked in the informal settlements in Karachi is suddenly assumed to be relevant to Ouagadougou or Port-au-Prince – or other cities in Pakistan.⁹⁵

Ironically, many of these ‘success stories’ developed locally, without any input from ‘international experts’ and often with little involvement of national governments – the locally generated development plan in Ilo, Peru,⁹⁶ the local agenda 21 developed in Manizales, Colombia (although this received support from the national government)⁹⁷, the civil-society driven governance system in Porto Alegre,⁹⁸ the community-managed sewer construction system in Karachi⁹⁹ (now hailed as a success but initially condemned as the wrong approach by external experts),¹⁰⁰ the community-managed resettlement programme in Mumbai¹⁰¹ and the community-managed toilets in Pune and Mumbai,¹⁰² the various housing projects developed by the South African Homeless

⁹⁵ See Alimuddin, Salim Arif Hasan and Asiya Sadiq (2000), *Community driven water and sanitation: The Work of the Anjuman Samaji Behbood and the Larger Faisalabad Context*, IIED Working Paper 7 on Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas, IIED, London, 84 pages for a discussion of how the successful community-driven sewer construction programme in Orangi, Karachi, had to be modified to make it effective in the city of Faisalabad.

⁹⁶ López Follegatti, Jose Luis (1999), "Ilo: a city in transformation", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol.11, No.2, October, pages 181-202.

⁹⁷ Velasquez, Luz Stella (1998), "Agenda 21; a form of joint environmental management in Manizales, Colombia", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol.10, No.2, pages 9-36.

⁹⁸ Menegat, Rualdo (2002), "Environmental management in Porto Alegre", *Environment and Urbanisation*, Vol.14, No.2; Souza, Celina (2001), "Participatory budgeting in Brazilian cities: limits and possibilities in building democratic institutions", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol 13, No 1, pages 159-184.

⁹⁹ Orangi Pilot Project (1995), NGO Profile: Orangi Pilot Project, *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol.7, No.2, October, pp. 227-236; Zaidi, S Akbar (2000), *Transforming Urban Settlements: the Orangi Pilot Project's low-cost sanitation model*, City Press, Karachi, 121 pages.

¹⁰⁰ Orangi Pilot Project 1995, op cit.

¹⁰¹ Patel, Sheela, Celine d’Cruz and Sundar Burra (2002), "Beyond evictions in a global city; people-managed resettlement in Mumbai", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pages 159-172.

¹⁰² Burra, Sundar and Sheela Patel (2002), *Community toilets in Pune and other Indian Cities*, PLA Notes; Special Issue on Participatory Governance, IIED, London.

People's Federation¹⁰³. Many of the more innovative and successful donor-funded urban initiatives have been the result of these donors channelling their funding through local institutions and allowing local decisions to determine priorities (with particular attention to ensuring that low income groups were involved in these decisions).

One of the most hopeful signs for poverty reduction in urban areas is the growing number of nations where there are representative organizations and federations formed by the urban poor themselves. These have demonstrated that they can articulate their needs and negotiate for them with governments and international agencies and also develop their own solutions, using these as examples to show what can be achieved by locally-generated, locally-controlled 'solutions.' In several cities in South Africa, there are many settlements developed by the Homeless People's Federation that have far better quality housing than that provided by government programmes, yet cost no more.¹⁰⁴ In several cities in India, the alliance formed between slum dwellers federations, *Mahila Milan* (cooperatives formed by women slum or pavement dwellers) and a local NGO SPARC have produced homes, neighbourhoods and community toilets that are far cheaper and better quality than most government schemes. Comparable innovations have been demonstrated by federations of the urban poor in Cambodia, Namibia, Philippines, Thailand and Zimbabwe and are emerging in several more nations.¹⁰⁵ These federations have even formed their own international umbrella organization, Shack Dwellers International, to increase their capacity to change the policies of international agencies and to support each other's efforts.¹⁰⁶

Thus, there is a need for 'deep democracy'¹⁰⁷ which includes local institutions that are representative of local populations and inclusive, in the sense of ensuring that everyone's views are represented. Such institutions must have the knowledge and capacity to ensure sustainable use of local resources and to ensure that basic infrastructure and services are available to all. They need the power and the legal basis to allow them to negotiate effectively with powerful external agencies or companies - even to question the proposals they put forward - and to hold these agencies or companies to account if they contravene agreements. Without such institutions, major projects or investments are profoundly undemocratic because the populations in the areas where these take place have little power to influence them. One structural difficulty that all the aid agencies and international development banks face is that they have no formal channels through which the views of their 'clients' (low-income groups in 'recipient nations') can influence their decisions. But there are some important exceptions. The UK Government's Department for International Development has provided support to local funds for community and municipal initiatives in two cities in Uganda and two cities in Zambia where decisions are made locally about what is funded - with such decisions accountable to and transparent to local populations.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Baumann, Ted, Joel Bolnick and Diana Mitlin (2001), *The Age of Cities and Organizations of the Urban Poor: The Work of the South African Homeless People's Federation and the People's Dialogue on Land and Shelter*, IIED Working Paper 2 on Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas, IIED, London.

¹⁰⁴ Baumann, Bolnick and Mitlin 2001, op. cit.

¹⁰⁵ See *Environment and Urbanisation* Vol. 13, No 2 (October 2001) for more details of the work of these different federations.

¹⁰⁶ See *Environment and Urbanisation* Vol. 13, No 2 (October 2001) for more details; also <http://www.dialogue.org.za/>

¹⁰⁷ Appadurai, Arjun (2001), "Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol 13 No 2, pages 23-43.

¹⁰⁸ Kiyaga-Nsubuga, John, Raphael Magyezi, Sarah O'Brien and Mark Sheldrake (2001), "Hope for the urban poor: DFID city community challenge (C3) fund pilot in Kampala and Jinja, Uganda", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol 13 No 1, pages 115-124; also Satterthwaite, David (2002), "Local funds and their

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has supported a range of local institutions in Central America that have helped improve housing conditions and basic services for large numbers of low income urban households at low unit costs and with many costs recovered to allow further investment in urban improvement elsewhere.¹⁰⁹ Some governments have also adopted this model – for instance the Urban Poor Fund set up by the government of Thailand in 1992 to support community-directed improvement programmes.¹¹⁰

potential to allow donor agencies to support community development and poverty reduction", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pages 179-188.

¹⁰⁹ Sida (1997), "Seeking more effective and sustainable support to improving housing and living conditions for low income households in urban areas: Sida's initiatives in Costa Rica, Chile and Nicaragua", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol.9, No.2, pages 213-231 and Stein, Alfredo (2001), "Participation and sustainability in social projects: the experience of the Local Development Programme (PRODEL) in Nicaragua", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol 13 No 1, pages 11-35.

¹¹⁰ UCDO (2000), *UCDO (Urban Community Development Office) Update No 2*, Urban Community Development Office, Bangkok, 32 pages.