Localising the Habitat Agenda
for Urban Poverty Reduction

DFID Research Project R-7963
Report on Inception and Main Phase

Project Summary

The Max Lock Centre
School of the Built Environment
University of Westminster

Water, Engineering and Development Centre (WEDC)
Loughborough University

September 2002

Project Summary

to the Infrastructure & Urban Development Department
Department for International Development (DFID)
UN-Habitat & The World Association of Cities and Local Authorities Co-ordination
(WACLAC)

'Localising the Habitat Agenda for Urban Poverty Reduction' is a major 3-year research programme funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development, under the *Urbanisation* Knowledge and Research theme. It is lead by a team at the Max Lock Centre at the University of Westminster in London, in partnership with the Water, Engineering and Development Centre, University of Loughborough and other partners in London, Nairobi, Delhi and Recife.

Inception and Main Phase Research Team

Max Lock Centre, University of Westminster, London
Bill Erickson, Catalina Gandelsonas, Michael Theis, Budhi Mulyawan, Inderjit Sagoo (Delhi) and Tony Lloyd-Jones (adviser)

Water, Engineering and Development Centre, University of Loughborough
Mansoor Ali, Julie Woodfield, Nigel Smith

Hillary Byrne, Social Development Advisor, London

Edesio Fernandes, Law Specialist, Urban Development Researcher, London

Arif Hasan, Urban Resource Centre, Pakistan

Wendy Taylor, Social Development Advisor, Nairobi, Kenya

Saad Yahya, Planning and Land Development Consultant, Nairobi, Kenya

Circe Gama Monteiro, Urban Planning and Social Development Researcher, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Recife, Brazil

Silva Ferretti, Researcher, Oxford Brookes University

Localising the Habitat Agenda
for Urban Poverty Reduction

THE RESEARCH

'Localising the Habitat Agenda for Urban Poverty Reduction' is a 4-year research programme funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development, under the Urbanisation Knowledge and Research theme. It is led by a team at the Max Lock Centre at the University of Westminster in London, in partnership with UN-Habitat, the World Association of Cities and Local Authorities Co-ordination, the Water, Engineering and Development Centre, University of Loughborough and partners in London, Nairobi, Delhi, Karachi and Recife. The Inception Phase of the research ran from April 2001 until March 2002.[1] The Main Phase began with a workshop in London in June 2002 and ends in 2005.

BACKGROUND AND OVERALL RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In 1996, the national governments represented in the United Nations, together with many NGOs, international and local government organisations, came together at the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul to agree the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and Habitat Agenda. The Habitat Agenda sets out goals, principles and commitments and a Global Plan of Action for achieving 'adequate shelter for all' and 'sustainable human settlements in an urbanising world'.

In June 2001, Habitat Agenda partners attended a Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York to discuss and appraise the first five years of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda ('Istanbul+5').

---

[1] All volumes of the Inception Phase Report including the country case studies for Brazil, Kenya, India and Spain can be downloaded from the research web site: http://www.citypoverty.net

This research project builds on the efforts that went into the recent five-year appraisal by asking, 'can the Habitat Agenda, as the internationally agreed policy framework for human settlements, usefully serve the purpose of urban poverty reduction?' In doing so it aims to facilitate the improved implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

Outputs and dissemination

Principal researchers are working with other partners including UN-Habitat and WACLAC together with government and civil society representatives in case study countries in developing and actively disseminating good practice in implementing the Habitat Agenda for urban poverty reduction.

The outputs will include policy recommendations and a toolkit of guidelines, indicators and methodologies for facilitating better partnerships and networking directed at governments, local governments and other Habitat Agenda partners.

The research will be action-based, with continuous use of local and regional workshops and inputs into international Habitat-related events. Generalised outputs in the form of guidelines will be disseminated through UN-Habitat channels and other DFID-related and international networks. The *citypoverty* website (http://www.citypoverty.net) will be further developed as a resource and more closely linked to associated sites.

The research will inform various UN Human Settlements Programme activities: in particular, the work of the new Urban Forum that incorporates the International Forum on Urban Poverty; the Global Campaign for Urban Governance; the Best Practice and Local Leadership Programme; and the Global Urban Observatory and Urban Indicators Programme. These initiatives have an important role in supporting local efforts to implement the Habitat Agenda.

While UN-Habitat, as the recognised international knowledge centre for urban development, will serve as a main conduit for disseminating outputs, other routes that ensure local ownership of the Habitat Agenda process will be explored.

Outcomes of the Inception Phase and Briefing Workshop:

The research initially focused on the knowledge-sharing aspect of the Habitat Agenda and, in particular, on the Best Practice approach as promoted by the UN-Habitat. The objectives were:

a) to review and evaluate the impact of the Habitat Agenda as a policy tool, particularly in relation to urban poverty reduction

b) to explore the requirements for sharing of effective practice in local development for poverty reduction, and

c) to set out the methodological basis for the rest of the study.

The Inception Phase methodology was based on an analysis of 4 case study countries: Kenya, Brazil, India and Spain, together with general background literature reviews and background papers on urban poverty and Habitat-related issues. The

country case studies were based on a review of the national report to Istanbul+5, of other relevant policy documents and on interviews with key actors in the reporting process.

The research in the Inception Phase suggested that a much wider awareness of and active involvement in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda is necessary everywhere, particularly on the part of civil society and local government, if it is to have any meaning beyond its 'advisory' nature and the formalities of a five year reporting process by national governments in the UN General Assembly.

The Inception phase findings confirm that the Habitat Agenda is insufficiently used as a policy tool for sustainable urban development and urban poverty reduction. Localisation of the Habitat Agenda process, in general, is patchy, but in the small sample of countries we have examined in the Inception Phase, there are examples of good practice – particularly in relation to land, livelihoods and shelter issues - that can be built on. There is encouraging evidence of a growing awareness of the usefulness of the Habitat Agenda in relation to best practices and advocacy. The Main Phase of the research aims to clarify this.

The Best Practice approach has had some positive impacts, particularly where it has been adopted as the main focus of the Habitat Agenda process (for example in Spain, and, to an increasing degree, in Brazil). However, real problems exist with issues around evaluation and transference, scaling up or replication. More broadly, however, it is recognised that the Habitat Agenda itself (in particular the Global Plan of Action) represents a global compendium and sourcebook of good practice in urban development policy for the period leading up to the Istanbul Conference and a framework for the future development of good urban policies. Since the idea of partnership figures as a central normative concept in the Habitat Agenda, this research should aim to give substance to what this concept really means in local development practice.

The findings of the Inception Phase studies suggest that, if the Habitat Agenda is to be localised, the Main Phase research should focus on the larger issues of urban governance and in particular, a strengthened role for civil society and local government. Thus, a better understanding of the process of urban governance and the role of the actors operating at the different levels – international, national, sub-national and local (city-wide and neighbourhood) is needed. A particular focus is the relationship between local and non-local stakeholders and how what happens at the interface between different levels of governance constrains effective practice.

All countries researched in the Inception Phase displayed some problems in the linkages between different Habitat Agenda partners and unequal partnerships and participation by the various Habitat Agenda partners arising from their relative political and financial strengths and weaknesses.

A better implementation of the Habitat Agenda is only possible with better governance as good governance can bring about promotion of human rights, constitutionalism, transparency and accountability, good leadership and an informed civil society that can make fair demands on public officials. At the local level, the impact of governance on land, shelter and livelihood issues is particularly critical for urban poverty reduction.

At the same time, it is possible to envisage the active use of the Habitat Agenda as a networking tool to contribute to the creation of good urban governance in relation to co-ordination, improved communication and knowledge-sharing between the different Habitat Agenda partners operating at the different levels and for setting out a basis for effective partnerships in urban development.

On the basis of this argument, the main hypotheses for the research are:

a) Effective measures to reduce urban poverty and improve the livelihoods conditions of those living in poverty (particularly through land shelter and livelihoods-focused policies) are strongly influenced by the institutional context and urban governance. Good governance is thus a pre-condition for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

b) A particular focus is the relationship between local and non-local stakeholders: what happens at the interface between different institutional/governance levels constrains effective practice and impacts on good governance. Thus in order to achieve good governance, among other measures, the issue of co-ordination of action by participants in the urban development process at all levels needs to be addressed. Of particular concern are the constraints imposed by the relative strengths and weaknesses of the different partners, and on problems of communication and knowledge sharing. The Habitat Agenda can serve as a framework for addressing these issues.

MAIN PHASE: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As a consequence of the findings of the Inception Phase, the following research questions inform the Main Phase case study work. They fall into four broad areas:

1. **Use of the Habitat Agenda by civil society:** How has the Habitat Agenda been used to add pressure 'from below' by civil society for progressive policies and legislation in the area of urban governance and urban poverty reduction? What lessons can be learned and generalised guidance given?

2. **Use of the Habitat Agenda as a framework for improving urban governance:** How can the Habitat Agenda be better used as a framework for improving urban governance through facilitating communication and networking between and among the different Habitat Agenda partners? How can the weak links be addressed? What are the specific roles of national and local governments, civil society, the private sector, local government federations and international associations of local governments and UN-Habitat in this process? How can these be improved? How can guidance be generalised and actively disseminated?

3. **Identification of good practice in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda:** What instruments have been used in different contexts to support the implementation of the Habitat Agenda (in particular those originated locally) in the processes of dissemination, monitoring and evaluation. What can be learned from LA 21?

4. **Use of the good and best practice mechanisms, specifically to aid urban poverty reduction**: How can the Habitat Agenda be better used as a framework for sharing best practice generally, and in urban poverty reduction specifically? What mechanisms beyond national competitions, the Dubai Best Practice competition and the Best Practices database are necessary to ensure that principles are identified, lessons are shared and good practice transferred?

5. **The role of international development co-operation:** How can international development co-operation be more specifically linked to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda? How can the Habitat Agenda commitments be linked to the more specific commitments of the Millennium Declaration? What are the implications for urban indicators, for reporting on progress on implementation of the Habitat Agenda and on guidance to donor and recipient governments?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the Main Phase, work on the original case study countries at the national level will be completed and supplemented with local level case studies and/or case studies that explore the active use of the Habitat agenda by civil society ('advocacy' case studies). Local case studies of good practice in urban poverty reduction will focus on the urban governance aspects and particularly on issues of the interface between the different spheres of government and levels of governance. Further focus will be around the interaction of local and non-local participants/ stakeholders, problems with communication and knowledge sharing at the 'interface', on inequalities in partnerships as they constrain effective practice and what allowed the practices under study to be 'good'. Local case studies, in turn, will inform the country case studies.

The other element in the research in the Main Phase is a broad-based evaluation of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda through the favoured approaches (e.g. urban indicators, best practice, plans of action, national Habitat committees) and its active use as a policy tool, in particular through the use of the Habitat Agenda commitments by civil society to put pressure on government for progressive change. A background paper on the international law implications and 'advocacy' aspects of the Habitat Agenda will be supplemented by local advocacy case studies.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for the main phase (currently set out in Section 2 of the Inception Phase Main Report) will be amplified with a paper on urban governance and will also be informed by a methodology paper on institutional and stakeholder analysis, and modelling of relationships between Habitat Agenda partners.

A Sustainable Livelihood Approach provides the overall conceptual framework within which a people-centred, asset-focused analysis of the multiple dimensions of poverty is related to urban governance issues. The institutional context forms part of the environment within which households and communities address their livelihoods,

accumulate assets and develop livelihood strategies. Thus a livelihoods framework will be used to link the urban poverty concept to an urban governance concept, within a broad livelihoods conceptual framework.

Further work will be done on urban poverty and livelihoods in relation to the Habitat Agenda to provide criteria (for making qualitative assessments and providing measurable indicators) for assessing poverty-reduction impacts of case studies of good practice.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF ISSUES

The way that the Habitat Agenda has been framed addresses the action of the full range of participants, from local communities to international agencies, taking in NGOs, the private sector and all levels of government. It is clear from the work done so far in this research that this inclusiveness is both a strength and a weakness. In practice the means of co-ordinating this activity does not exist. Although the UN-Habitat has made a brave effort to do so, other mechanisms at the international, regional, national, sub-national and local levels need to be developed. Only then can the Habitat Agenda play its intended role as a standard for internationally agreed commitments on affordable and sustainable human habitat for all.

The country studies carried out in the Inception Phase raised a number of questions around the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The Habitat Agenda, more than any other, addresses that range of factors that contribute to urban poverty but can it be used more proactively to achieve greater recognition of the scale and complexity of urban poverty? The studies all suggest that we need a better understanding of the process of urban governance, the role of the participants at the different levels and the role of macro-micro links. At what level, national, intermediate or local is the Habitat Agenda having the greatest policy impact? In particular the following questions need to be addressed

At all levels:

- What can be done to make the Habitat Agenda more country or locally specific and relevant?
- What mechanisms and channels are necessary to achieve better communications and more evenly-balanced, inclusive relationships between all the Habitat Agenda partners (most importantly those at the local level)?
- What mechanisms and channels, both official and un-official, are most effective in promoting and monitoring the implementation of the Habitat Agenda commitments at all levels?
- How has the Best Practice initiative promoted the adoption of the commitments of the Agenda, particularly in relation to poverty reduction and how can it be made more effective?

At the national and intermediate (State/Provincial) levels:

- What should be the role of higher levels of government in facilitating the localisation of the Habitat Agenda in the context of growing decentralisation?
- What have been the main obstacles to translating the Habitat Agenda from a national commitment to inform selected national policies?

- How can the commitments in the Agenda be integrated at a local level where responsibilities in higher levels of government are divided both across sector-based ministries as well as between national and state/intermediate governments?

At the local level:

- How can the internationally agreed Agenda commitments inform local, participatory urban governance and development so as to promote effective poverty reduction measures?
- What is the role of the Habitat Agenda as a policy framework for poverty reduction at a local level where urban poverty is widespread and there is limited local government capacity? What part can NGOs and CBOs play?
- What determines the 'readiness' of a city or town to successfully adopt the Agenda?
- What are the most effective approaches for improving the 'readiness' of local government and civil society organisations for the implementation of the Agenda?
- How has the Best Practice initiative promoted the implementation of the commitments of the Agenda in local policies and initiatives, particularly in relation to poverty reduction?
- In practice, has the lack of meaningful indictors inhibited wider local use of the Agenda?
- What are the most relevant indicators at a local level for judging the effectiveness of particular policies and initiatives including Best Practice?