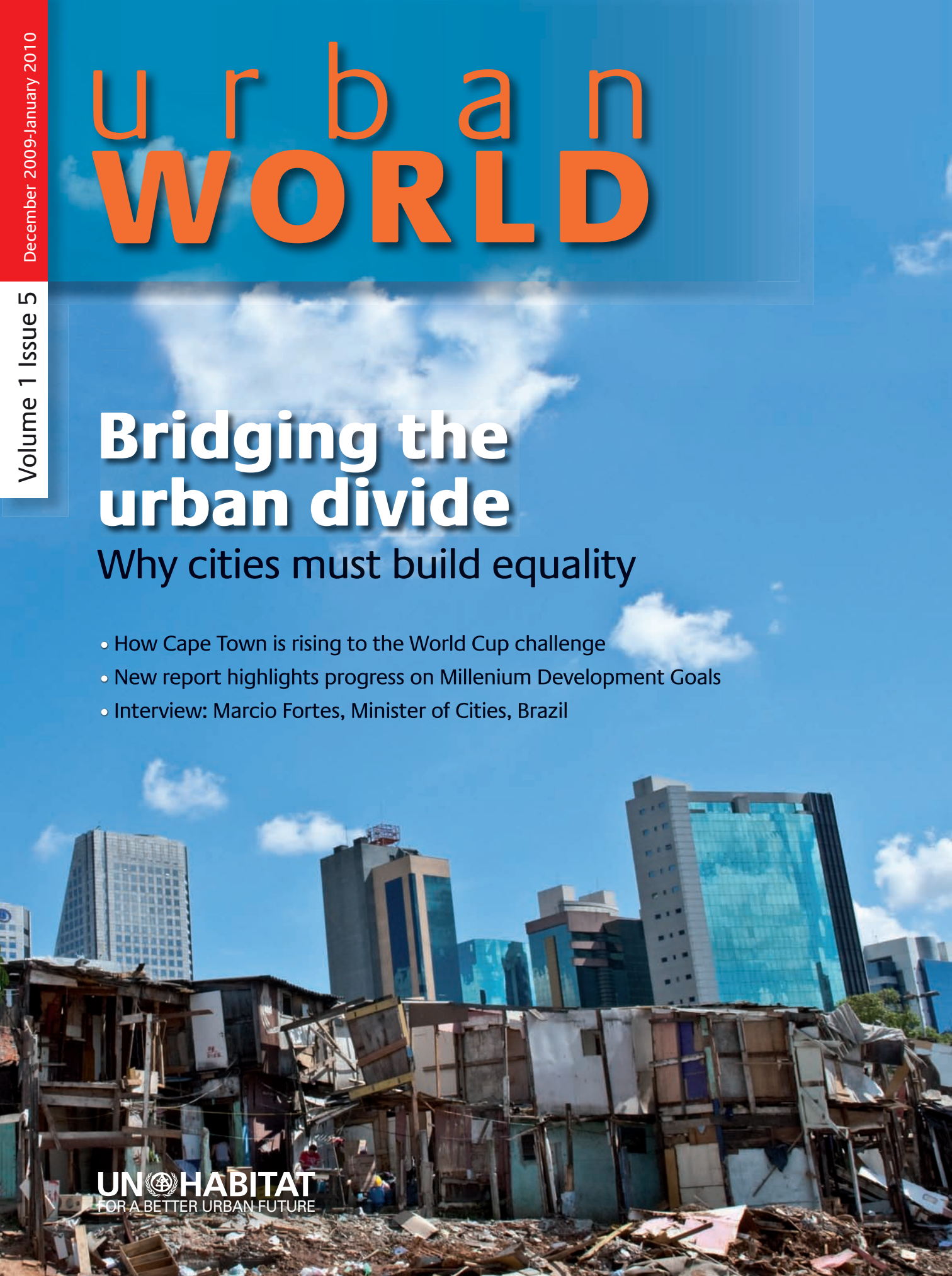


urban WORLD

Bridging the urban divide

Why cities must build equality

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- New report highlights progress on Millenium Development Goals
- Interview: Marcio Fortes, Minister of Cities, Brazil



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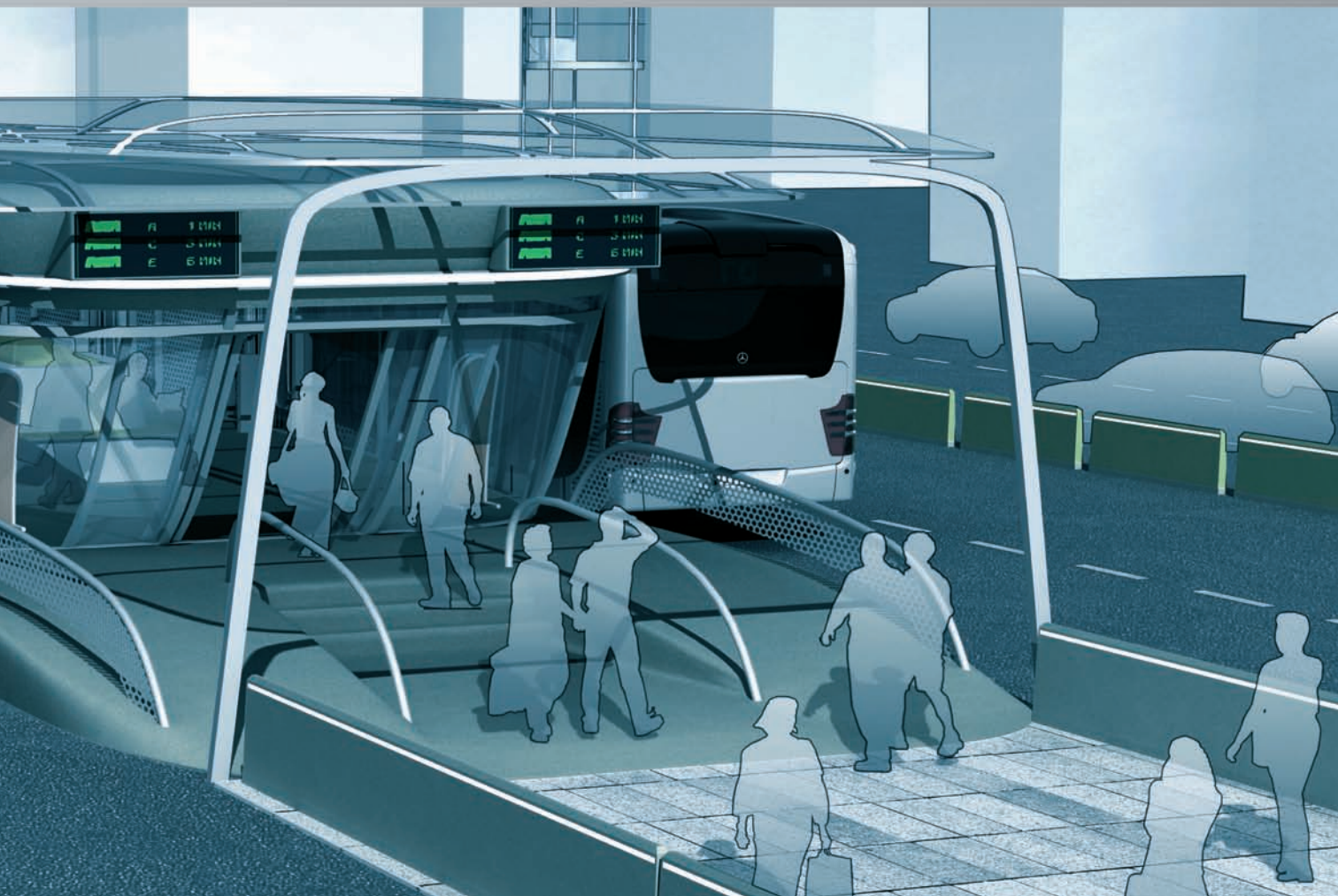
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The urban divide stands out as one of the major paradoxes – some would say scandals – of this early 21st century.

After all, cities concentrate what has become known as the ‘urban advantage’, namely, a bundle of opportunities which, from basic services to health, education, amenities and gainful employment, have never been so favourable to human development. Yet all too frequently, cities also concentrate high, unacceptable degrees of inequality as these opportunities elude major segments of the population.

Equal access to urban services and opportunities is often restricted by all kinds of invisible barriers, but the outcome is so visible. Look, for example, at the growing number of gated communities in many countries that continue to shut the have-nots out. Walk along a street in the capital of a developing country, and you can see the back of the well-served, well-appointed local headquarters of a worldwide business consultancy facing a row of tiny, ramshackle shops catering to the needs of low-income residents.

More often than not, the bumpy stretch of mud that passes for a street will lead to a slum—the cruellest form of urban divide.

The other paradox – or scandal – of early 21st century cities is that the opportunities that come with the ‘urban advantage’ are often closed to women, children and young people with vital roles to play in our collective future. Beyond livelihoods, health and personal development, the whole continuum of deprivations that characterizes the wrong side of the urban divide has a tangible impact on bodies and minds, stunting the physical and intellectual potential of millions among present and future generations.

Even from a purely economic perspective, the stark inequalities making the urban divide look paradoxical too. Business and affluent residential areas typically thrive on the many cross-border linkages that ultimately connect them to the tight network of ‘global’ cities dominating the world economy. The resulting prosperity is what drives the rural poor and immigrants into urban areas, in the hope of securing their own fair share.

The irony is that for lack of qualifications or opportunities, they remain largely confined to a slum-based informal sector that looks like an inverted image of the glowing formal economy in terms of productivity, technology and business connections.

Nearly 10 years into the 21st century, the urban divide has become so acute that its main determinants have, in turn, become easier to identify. Just as slums and sub-standard housing stand as the by-products of inadequate land and housing policies, the informal economy stands as an offshoot of inadequate regulation.

Today’s urban divide is largely an outcome of the biases and inadequacies of the three main tiers of government – central, local and municipal.



The international survey at the core of UN-HABITAT’s forthcoming *State of the World Cities Report 2010 – Closing the Urban Divide* does more than identify the factors behind the economic, social, political and cultural inequalities that continue to plague so many urban areas across the world. Survey respondents and analysts answer the challenges of the urban divide with a number of pointed recommendations.

I believe that the way public authorities perform their duties is just as important as the nature of what they achieve. Governments must strengthen existing institutions, or create new ones. Effectiveness also

requires new linkages and alliances to be established between the three tiers of government as a matter of daily routine, for the sake of sustained, enhanced coordination and sharing of resources across any political gaps or shifts.

A realistic assessment of specific assets and potential opportunities must give rise to a sustained, comprehensive “vision” for any given city, and one that speaks to the aspirations of the whole population. The gradual realization of this vision entails the broader, more equitable redistribution needed to close the urban divide.

Such sustained redistribution cannot be just of an economic nature: integrating the poor and marginalized into mainstream urban life calls for a redistribution of broader opportunities as well. This brings improved quality of life, human capital as well as enhanced political and cultural inclusion. It also brings cleaner, greener cities, and places that are good for business for everyone.

Experience shows that lack of inclusionary planning is only planning for trouble. Any sustainable vision for the future of any city can only be of an inclusive, not divisive nature.

These are just some of the reasons why we have chosen to launch a new global campaign at the Fifth Session of the World Urban Forum in Rio de Janeiro. We see Rio as the beginning of something new – the World Urban Campaign. We are launching the campaign to keep up the momentum of the forum, to heed the messages of our partners inside and outside government, the private sector, and of course our survey respondents.

The idea is to start with 100 best cities in the world and then trumpet their ideas to spread the word to more and more cities so that we can multiply to 1,000 cities and beyond. This is how UN-HABITAT and our partners will lobby to bridge the urban divide.

Anna Tibaijuka
Executive Director UN-HABITAT

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads 'Anna Tibaijuka'.

Unequal cities means unequal lives

Cities seeking to present themselves as world-class destinations for political and sporting events must not forget the rights of low-income citizens. By **Miloon Kothari and Shivani Chaudhry***.



At times the brightest spotlights cast the longest shadows. Cities today compete to host worldwide sports and other large events in a bid to enhance their global profiles. They vie to attract foreign investment and high-profile expatriates. They also attempt to transform themselves to meet superficial world class standards. This stands in sharp contrast to the exclusionary and repressive treatment these cities mete out to the poorest of their own residents, including those pejoratively categorized as the homeless, squatters, beggars, immigrants and refugees. The two symbols of this contemporary urbanization bias combine to give the urban divide its most dramatic and unethical visual dimension – one that is best reversed with a human rights approach.

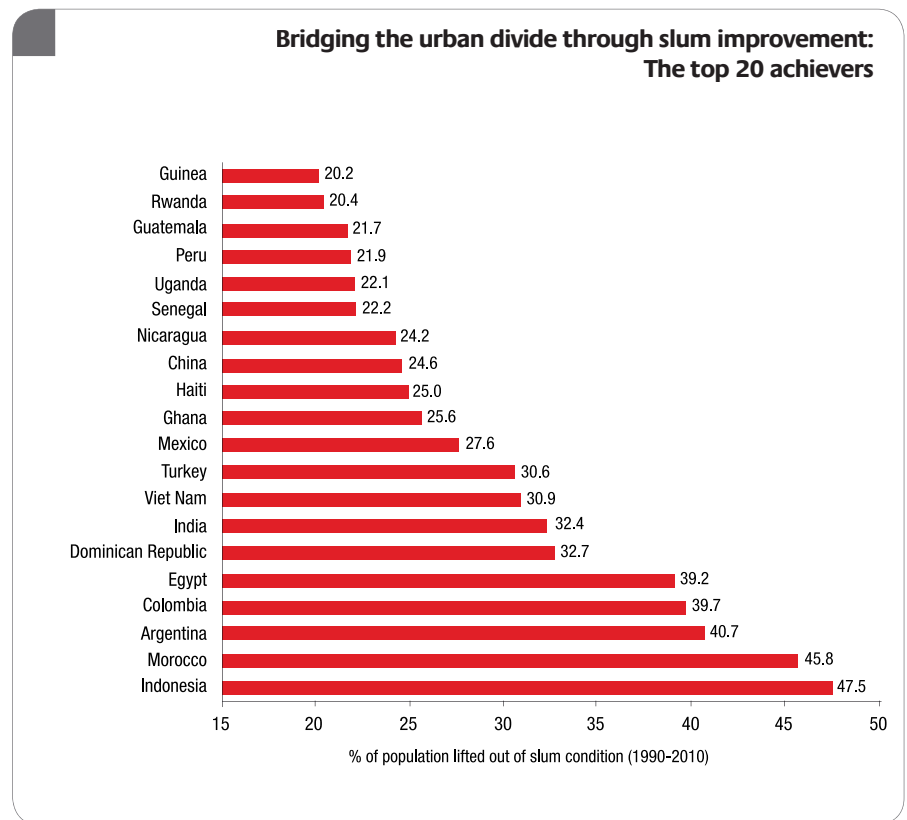
Most cities, unfortunately, do not recognize everyone equally. Neither do they make their services, benefits or opportunities available to all. The most marginalized and the poorest are the ones who suffer most. The onset of economic globalization and the institutionalization of neo-liberal policies, including through privatization of civic services, has led to deepening inequalities of income and opportunity between and within cities.

Popular international sports events act as powerful symbols for cities vying for the global tag. Via the media, they focus the attention of hundreds of millions around the world on lavish displays of infrastructure that epitomize the dynamism and prosperity of the host city, but are generally built at the cost of homes and livelihoods of the urban poor. Since most of these amenities require extensive stretches of land in prime locations, they cause significant displacement of local, generally low-income communities, especially those living in informal settlements.

Negative trends

Intense land speculation associated with the upcoming 2012 Olympics is uprooting low-income working class and migrant communities in north London. Gentrification initiated by wealthy expatriate bankers has created a cultural uniformity while destroying a historic cosmopolitan social mix, often with the complicity of local authorities.

The 1988 Olympic Games affected as many as 720,000 local residents in Seoul while the 2008 Olympics affected 350,000 in Beijing. The New Delhi Commonwealth Games and



Vancouver Winter Olympics, both scheduled for 2010, have already resulted in forced evictions of low-income residents, including slum dwellers, and clearing of streets of the homeless and beggars to make way for sanitized cities to benefit visitors.

So-called clean-up programmes associated with the football World Cup led to the displacement of homeless people in Osaka in 2002. Fears have also been expressed on the impact that preparations for the forthcoming 2010 World Cup in South Africa, will have on many families' housing rights in that country.

Will Vancouver use the excuse of extreme cold weather to force more homeless people off the streets during the 2010 winter Olympics? And will Rio de Janeiro, the 2016 summer Olympics host, be any better?.

Land-appropriating events like large exhibitions have similar effects on local low-income residents. In Seville, the bulldozing of low-income homes came as the downside of the 1992 World Expo. According to the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), the same is happening in Shanghai, as the Chinese

metropolis prepares to host the Expo 2010. As many as 18,000 families have already been evicted from the exhibition site alone, and close to 400,000 people are to be moved to the suburbs under a comprehensive urban development scheme involving market rate commercial and residential development.

Other major international events that trigger little more than beautification efforts could be detrimental to local residents. In Manila, the 1976 annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank saw the forced eviction of 400 slum-dwelling families. Nine years later in Seoul, preparations for the same event involved the eviction of 1,200 families with bulldozers and police, and reportedly with only nominal compensation.

Criminalizing poverty

Apart from such one-off, highly symbolic mega-events, cities look to burnish their global credentials through gentrification, for the sake of wealthy residents, and beautification, for the purposes of tourism. Gentrification and the associated culture of segregation and gated



The 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver has already resulted in forced evictions

PHOTO © JASON ANTONY

Privatization of basic civic and social services has a disproportionately adverse impact on the poor

communities that it promotes, serves to destroy multi-cultural and mixed-income neighbourhoods. These twin policies result in various forms of discrimination against the homeless and beggars – those symbols of a society's failure to take care of its more underprivileged citizens.

In an attempt to garner international appeal and to promote a world class image of their cities, public authorities violate universally recognized human rights. This includes, inter alia, the rights to adequate housing, land, water, security of the person and home, health, education, work and livelihood.

Authorities do this through enforcement of discriminatory legislation such as anti-vagrancy and anti-beggary laws, biased use of criminal codes, anti-squatting laws, misuse of anti-terrorism laws, new surveillance strategies, and zero-tolerance policies. In London, even the public benches where the homeless used to sit are wetted down or removed.

Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxemburg, Slovenia and Sweden are some of the countries where both private and public security services have been accused of violence and harassment against the homeless. Cases of crude violence, rape and even murder have been observed recently in Slovenia, Spain and the Czech Republic. Incidents of violence, including by the police, as well as arbitrary arrests of the homeless and beggars are also occurring in different parts of India.

Shelters for the homeless, where they exist, are generally inadequate and typically located away from the city centre. This social exclusion and segregation adds to the territorial stigmatization and discriminatory practices already in place.

Measures such as explicit prohibition on searching through rubbish (as enforced in many north American cities and recently proposed by the mayor of Rome), or lock-out of waste-dumps effectively deprive the homeless

from what are tragically their basic sources of subsistence.

Other steps involve more or less explicit criminalization of extreme poverty. Canada clamps down on vagrants through back door measures such as fingerprinting welfare recipients, new municipal by-laws, and zero tolerance policing. Since 1995 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, begging in public is punished with USD 1,000 fines or six month jail terms.

In Australia, two States – Queensland and Western Australia – enforce vagrancy laws. Criminalization of the homeless can take other forms. In the year 1999-2000, 2,640 people were arrested for vagrancy in Queensland, of who 282 were charged with begging and 15 with having no visible means of subsistence; 83 were jailed and a further 112 were fined. Defaulting on payment carried an automatic jail sentence. This turns vagrancy into one of the surest pathways to prison.

A destructive path

In the United States, the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) showed in 2004, that of 224 cities surveyed, 43 percent prohibit begging in specific public places, 45



Privatization of basic social services has a disproportionately adverse affect on the poor

PHOTO © EVA SCHUSTER

percent prohibit panhandling, and 21 percent enforce general prohibitions on begging.

In a 2008 survey, the United States Conference of Mayors found that criminalizing homelessness appeared to be a growing trend. A survey of 67 cities showed a 12 percent increase in the number of laws prohibiting begging in specific public places, an 18 percent increase in laws against aggressive panhandling, and a 3 percent increase in laws prohibiting loitering, loafing, or vagrancy.

In Switzerland, courts have ruled that begging is not a right and that cantonal prohibitions were permitted in the interest of public safety and tranquillity. As of April 2008, police are authorized to enforce on-the-spot fines directly from a beggar's takings. Swiss law also provides for the deportation of foreigners lacking the means to support themselves.

In India, the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act 1959 is routinely used to round up and take punitive action against beggars and the homeless, even when they are gainfully employed.

Urban infrastructure expansion and other projects such as the construction of highways,

flyovers, shopping malls and ports, often lead to the demolition of informal settlements and the forced eviction of their residents, generally without adequate rehabilitation. This further exacerbates the crisis of housing and living conditions in cities while widening inequalities and deepening poverty.

Privatization of basic civic and social services in cities, coupled with the inability of governments to provide citizens affordable access to human rights such as water and housing, tends to have a disproportionately adverse impact on the poor, the most vulnerable and socially marginalized segments of society.

City Master Plans prepared without due consultation, further promote land use policies that serve the interests of the economically and politically powerful at the cost of the urban poor and working classes.

These violations of universally recognized human rights turn beautified cities into exclusionary zones, into places of discrimination, inequality, and hostility. The failure of urban planning to design and sustain well-integrated and inclusionary spaces for the sake of residents' individual and collective development has created a situation where

the 'beautified' city benefits only those who can afford to live in it.

The victims of this lopsided, inequitable developmental paradigm count among the most discriminated, marginalized and vulnerable groups, including the poor; slum dwellers; migrants; nomads, including the gypsies; religious, sexual and ethnic minorities; groups discriminated on grounds of work and descent; persons with disabilities or living with mental illness or HIV/AIDS; indigenous peoples; sex workers; domestic workers; the elderly; refugees; women, in particular single women, single mothers, ethnic minority women; and children, in particular street children.

Urban life cannot continue on this destructive path. Concerted efforts at rethinking and reforming urban areas and planning processes must ensure that cities are truly accessible to everyone, and that they respect, uphold and fulfil the human rights of all residents without any discrimination.

A human rights-based approach

If they are to make progress in creating a more inclusive city, municipal authorities do not ►



Urban expansion often leads to the demolition of informal settlements

PHOTO © A. LAXMAN

need just a new vision – they need a dramatic ideological, paradigmatic and policy shift.

A human rights-based approach has the merit of including the four major types of urban exclusion – economic, social, political and cultural, and of emphasizing the responsibility and legal obligation of states and local authorities to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all, especially of the underprivileged, marginalized, and most vulnerable.

This approach necessitates understanding the features of the right to the city (as set out in the *Global Charter-Agenda on Human Rights in the City*). Far from being a new legal instrument, the right to the city incorporates a wide range of universally recognized human rights into a single claim for enforcement in urban areas with the aim of creating more holistic, equitable, just, and sustainable living spaces. Any violation of human rights amounts to a violation of the right to the city.

The right to the city is grounded in the basic human rights principles of: non-discrimination; indivisibility of human rights; gender equality; progressive realization; non-retrogression; solidarity; and international cooperation. Moreover, it is in the very nature of the concept to suggest priority attention to vulnerable groups and individuals, with responsibility and sustainability as core principles.

As part of the shift to the human rights model, municipal authorities around the world can also take advantage of the best practices developed by cities that have adopted a human rights approach to urban management and planning.

Positive initiatives

The Montreal Charter commits the Canadian municipality to develop a framework for the rights and reciprocal responsibilities of the population and local authorities. The Charter states

that “the city of Montreal is both a territory and a living space in which values of human dignity, tolerance, peace, inclusion and equality must be promoted among all citizens”. As a covenant between the population and the authorities, the Montreal Charter entitles everyone to the full benefits of life in the city.

The Brazil City Statute is revolutionary in that it redefines the concept of land ownership and promotes the social dimension of the right to urban property. The Statute also promotes democratic participation in urban management, and provides for legal instruments to regularize informal settlements and tax vacant under-used land. Particularly valuable from a human rights perspective is the provision in the Statute that makes it mandatory for all municipalities in Brazil to designate special zones of social interest which would especially serve to protect the right to the city for the most marginalized.



Many US cities, like Winnipeg, enforce strict vagrancy laws

PHOTO © BEN YOKITIS

Human rights approaches also facilitate the development of inclusive policies. In Lyon in France, such approaches help reduce spatial disparity. In Eugene, Oregon (USA), the human rights approach enhances participatory decision-making in municipal affairs. Stonington (outside Melbourne, Australia) has adopted a human rights charter, as has Washington DC in the US. The city of Toronto in Canada has adopted a City Charter recognizing the right to housing while Mexico City has set up a human rights directorate.

These examples demonstrate that a human rights-based approach can meet the needs of cities as well as inspire cities of various sizes to achieve a more inclusive, equitable, just, pluralist, progressive, and sustainable urban environment. This approach could also instill a well-shared sense of pride and self respect among both municipal administrators and city residents.

Protection of rights by cities

Cities must guarantee human rights to all those women, men, youth and children who choose to make the city their home – irrespective of their economic status, identity, caste, class, race, gender, religion, sexual affiliation, work, civil status, and regardless of whether they are legal inhabitants or citizens.

Cities must especially protect women's rights to privacy, security, movement, work, and freedom from violence. Effective, democratic and gendered participation in local decision-making and planning is critical to the realization of human rights in a city.

The principle of the social function of property should guide all land use planning to ensure that land is not diverted to meet the interests of the rich at the expense of the poor. Cities must recognize diversity in all its forms and promote a culture of tolerance and mutual respect.

The adoption and implementation of a strong human rights-based approach is the only way to preserve and uphold the dignity of all residents of the city, and to address the multiple violations and problems being faced by millions in cities across the world today. ♦

Miloon Kothari is a human rights activist, scholar and architect based in New Delhi. He is the former Special Rapporteur on adequate housing (2000-2008), United Nations Human Rights Council.

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