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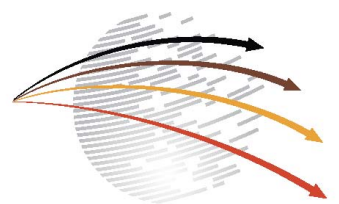
Provocateur Briefing Report

Forum on Development and Mitigation

DEVELOPMENT FOCUS

Urban Poverty

- **Date:** 28 February 2014
- **Author:** Aditya Kumar
- **Institution:** Community Organization Resource Centre
- **Contact:** adikumar.ak@gmail.com



M A P S

Mitigation Action Plans & Scenarios

From 27-29 January 2014, over one hundred professionals working mainly in the climate change mitigation field, in Southern contexts, gathered at the Cape Town Waterfront for the Forum on Development and Mitigation (the Forum). The event was hosted by the Energy Research Centre of the University of Cape Town, the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi, and the international Mitigation Action Plans and Scenarios (MAPS) Programme. As a feature of the Forum nine South African development experts, the 'Development Provocateurs' were invited to participate in the event and write a short reflective piece afterwards. These briefing notes considered the discourse at the Forum from the perspective of each Provocateur's particular area of expertise, looking at shared priorities, disconnects and other points of contact.

This briefing note responds from the perspective of 'Urban Poverty' by Aditya Kumar. The full set of briefings have been compiled into a compendium, available at www.devmitforum.ercresources.org.za and www.mapsprogramme.org.

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INFORMALITY, URBAN POVERTY AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATION

Introduction

Urbanisation over the last four decades has created highly segregated and unequal cities. Neoliberal policies, through international trade agreements, have weakened rural and agrarian societies and created a strong pull factor to the cities, leading to a shelter crisis within cities. The burgeoning of informal settlements and slums was the people's response to survival in search of livelihoods and social services. In South Africa, the apartheid urban form has exacerbated poverty by the location of informal settlements on the urban edge rather than in the centre of the city. The traditional response has been to strengthen National, Provincial and Local government to address informal settlements through eradication of slums, and housing policy instruments like the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The RDP programme, later renamed Breaking New Ground (BNG) provides housing for the poorest of poor earning under R3,500 per month. This top down developer driven implementation strategy combined with poor land selection has led to poorly built houses with a lack of ownership from the residents. More recently, the Upgrading of the Informal Settlements Programme (UISP) has adopted a more nuanced incremental and in-situ approach to development. However, even the UISP policy is being implemented on greenfield rather than brownfield sites resulting in relocation of residents to alternative land (potentially outside the city). None of these policy instruments have showed significant impact on poverty, rather deepening the divide between communities and government. Through the late 1990s, there has been a push to place communities at the centre of development. However the attempts to build more robust participatory mechanisms have also failed to deliver deeper sense of citizenship amongst poor communities.

In my view, communities need to have control over their own development. This is not just about communities being the design, build, and maintenance body, but that they are in control of the knowledge and resources that drive development. In our organisation we commonly use the phrase 'Amandla Imali Nolwazi' (Power is Knowledge and Money), implying that communities that are empowered with knowledge of their neighbourhood, supplemented with their own resources are in a better position to negotiate their rights with government. So whether it be developmental or mitigation issues, building a strong voice and solidarity of the urban poor is key to a better environment globally.

The conference, paper presentations and proceedings were very compelling. It has become critical for development professionals to understand the global debates around climate change and mitigation. The conference triggered the following thoughts:

‘Learning by doing’

One of the speakers brought up the notion of ‘learning by doing’ as a counter to the Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action discourse. My observation was that the climate change mitigation shouldn’t make the same mistakes as the development sector. The development sector has failed to respond to the needs of the urban poor and it appears that the mitigation agenda is heading in the same direction. In the development sector, the focus has been to develop strong policies at the national Government level to build more inclusive cities. However, the very abstract dialogue at national level has had the completely opposite impact on poverty. For instance, South Africa has a strong policy around housing for the urban poor in providing both social grants and housing subsidies. Yet, after twenty years of the subsidy programmes, the country has witnessed a 900% increase in informal settlements (from 300 to 2,700) (NUSP, 2013) and a continuing backlog of people waiting for housing. From a city building perspective, this national programme has further divided the urban fabric, by locating communities on land distant from employment, putting a heavy burden on transport, and thus increasing carbon emissions. Secondly, and related to this, is the effort of the last two decades to strengthen local government to deal with rapid urbanisation. This has witnessed significant resource flows shifting from national governments to local governments. The debate around network infrastructure at the City scale is perhaps the most useful here.

In the conference, I found numerous discussions about global and national scale, yet the city and neighbourhood scale discussion was largely missing. Local government is the implementing agent for all projects and it is crucial to mainstream mitigation thinking at that level. Also clearly defining mitigation actions at all scales - global, national, provincial, local, neighbourhood and household level, is key.

1. ‘Unlocking governance and participation’

An opportunity that I felt could be explored further is around governance and participation of civil society in the development and mitigation agenda. A plethora of research papers and policies has been written to deepen community participation and network governance in our cities. However, the State’s attempts to formalise invited spaces for participation has failed to gather critical input from communities. For instance, the Integrated Development Plan and budgetary meetings in South Africa have failed to engage the urban poor in a meaningful way, further dividing state and civil society. Civil society participation has become a checklist for compliance.

Climate change mitigation runs the same risk, if it fails to unpack the science for the communities. Several communities have been threatened with evictions through climate impacts. Unless proper frameworks for community participation are mainstreamed into this debate, the mitigation community is going to face deep resistance from civil society. Climate change is clearly about statistics and science, but needs to develop a heart.

2. Implementation as an instrument

A number of speakers alluded to the importance of implementation and real improvements. No form of policy and technology can upscale across a city or nation, without a broader buy in and feedback through implementation. Drawing on experiences from the development sector, implementation is about deal making and negotiations. For instance, it has taken

our organisation eight months to install twenty-one toilets in a settlement that was using conventional water borne services. If this is the lead-time for delivery around common services, how do we expect to innovate around mitigation?

The key is to demonstrate action that brings about change in peoples' lives. Without measurable, visible improvements, climate change can become nothing more than a flavour of the day.

3. 'How does climate change impact you?'

Recently a student from a United Kingdom university came and asked a person in the slum "how does climate change impact you?". Besides the naivety of the question, the comment clearly misunderstands the relationship of our environment and poverty.

The manner in which conference papers discussed poverty was quite regressive. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of national development has been discounted by several research investigations and has failed to represent reality on the ground. It also appeared in the conference proceedings that the urban poor need support. For the last few decades, the development sector has tried hard to 'solve' the problem of informality. Within the more progressive developmental discourse, the urban poor are the most resilient, having enterprising solutions for shelter, livelihood and frequently around mitigation of flooding and fires.

Communities and networks of the urban poor are organising themselves to inform local-level solutions. For instance, Ugandan (Slum/Shack Dwellers International) federations are using recycled waste to produce cooking brickettes and a community led solid waste management programme is self-organising to remove 60 Metric Tonnes of recyclables from the Khayelitsha waste stream in Cape Town. These are mere instances of the nature of grassroots organising and proactive action that were completely overlooked by the broader debates of the Forum. Most of the small-scale innovations that were brought up in the proceedings were technology improvements rather than community/ citywide civil society processes.

If the mitigation community is serious, there needs to be efforts to unpack climate change with civil society and community groups to jointly come up with solutions. Simultaneously, the mitigation community needs to move away from the notion that governments are in control of their nation and cities. In particular, the session on climate financing was very disturbing and straightjacketed. It didn't look at innovative ways of resourcing mitigation measures and relied predominantly around global north funding. The whole sector of microfinance, community savings, local resources etc. were completely overlooked as creative finance mechanisms.

4. Intermediary organisations

There was a lack of discussion around the role of intermediary organisations in the proceedings. NGOs play a significant role in lobbying and advocating civil society and the State around development and mitigation issues. Getting a broader support from intermediaries is key to achieve successful policy and implementation.

5. Practitioners

The role of sensitised and conscious practitioners is a significant opportunity. Clearly, climate change mitigation is a cross cutting issue linking science, economics, and spatial planning and urbanisation policies. This requires a significant rethink in the manner in which urban practitioners are trained. City planners need to understand the broader implications of climate

change and policies that assist in mitigation. Leadership, training and mentoring of existing practitioners is equally significant to deal with the challenge.

6. Unpack the jargon

The conference papers used a lot of jargon and complex acronyms that have little impact on practice. A lesson learnt from the development sector is to keep it simple.

References

National Upgrading Support Programme (NUSP), National Department of Human Settlement, Western Cape Workshop 14-15 November 2013.