

Improving data collection for urban planning through participatory enumerations



Residents can check data in the field, correct errors, and point out disputes over land rights

Photo: Menberu Allebachew, World Bank, Ethiopia

A new form of urban planning

A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES are starting to adopt more innovative approaches to urban planning. These include strategic spatial planning, the use of spatial planning to integrate public-sector functions and include a territorial dimension, new land regularization and management approaches, participatory processes and partnerships at the neighbourhood level, and new forms of master planning that are bottom-up and oriented towards social justice (UN-HABITAT 2009).

But more conventional forms of master planning still persist in many developing countries. These approaches fail to accommodate the way the majority of inhabitants live in rapidly growing, poor and informal cities. They have often directly contributed to further social and spatial marginalization.

In the developing world, one out of every three people living in cities lives in a slum, and many slums are growing as fast as cities themselves (UN-HABITAT 2008). New forms of urban planning must prioritize and address rapid urbanization, urban poverty, informality, slums and access to basic services.

Conventional urban planning approaches do not involve the very people the plans are made for. For planning to be more effective, it must include meaningful participation by local residents, in a socially inclusive way. That means encouraging the active participation and genuine negotiation by all citizens. Local politics and planning must specify how participatory processes can influence plan preparation and decision-making. Funding is needed to support the implementation of decisions arising from participatory planning processes. The capacity of professionals must be enhanced to incorporate the outcomes of participation into their work (UN-HABITAT 2009).

Participatory enumerations

Urban planning requires good quality information about the physical, socio-economic, spatial, and environmental conditions of poor neighbourhoods. That means collecting and analysing information, and devising, debating and agreeing on solutions. But in many locations – and especially in informal settlements – the information available is insufficient, unreliable and out of date. It very often reflects the *de jure* situation, not the *de facto* reality on the ground. That means that planners and other land professionals are working without full knowledge of the true situation. That is dangerous: it

Participatory enumerations

Participatory enumeration is a data-gathering process which is to a significant extent jointly designed and conducted by the people who are being surveyed.

can lead to bad decisions, plans that cannot be implemented, grave injustices, and social unrest.

Participatory enumerations have the potential to supply the kinds of information that are needed.

Rather than creating specialist teams of external enumerators, it is often more effective to have people from the community be the main enumerators. Urban poor communities around the world already collect information about themselves, especially so they can press for improved security of tenure. They conduct household and livelihood surveys, housing profiling and structure surveys; they draw maps, keep records and conduct local censuses for different purposes – some even at a city-wide scale.

Increasingly, participatory enumerations are done through partnerships between local communities, planners and local authorities. In effective partnerships, poor communities are key providers of information,

strategies and priorities rather than passive beneficiaries of external assistance. The data generated can be used not only by communities themselves but for formal planning purposes.

How enumeration data can contribute to inclusive urban planning

Participatory enumerations make it possible to better understand the problems of poor residents. They can ensure that planning standards are appropriate, affordable and have legitimacy. They identify areas and types of vulnerability to risk. They also enable planning for current shortfalls and future trends in regard to transport, social amenities, land use and economic planning for the city as a whole. They can also show trends in regard to urban sprawl.

In the planning or upgrading of informal settlements, participatory enumerations provide information about which houses and people may be affected by a plan. The enumeration process itself strengthens the community so that it becomes possible for residents to negotiate among themselves and with the authorities about upgrading, services, tenure provisions or relocation. The data can serve as baseline information when the plan is being implemented to monitor progress and detect problems. They can also be used to work out the best methods and options of ensuring that everyone has adequate housing.

Participatory enumerations help make the planning process transparent. They enable poor communities to articulate their needs and engage with planners in identifying options and strategies to improve their lives. At the same time, they increase the likeli-

hood of local buy-in and adherence to urban plans.

Way forward

Building on their effectiveness for community planning, participatory enumerations also have the potential to deliver information city-wide. For inclusive city-wide planning, planners will need to be re-trained in ways of doing things; regulations must be rewritten, and new tools and methods for planning must be developed. A new range of urban planning standards needs to be set, acknowledging that there are some who cannot afford any planning at all.

Examples of mechanisms under way include:

Joint production of enumeration questionnaires and information gathering.

In the Community Land Information Programme in Namibia, planners have been involved in setting the enumeration questionnaires and gathering the information. This meant both the community and the planners could trust the process and the data generated.

Re-thinking the link between registration of land rights and services, building codes, planning and site size.

Seen in several transitional economies, land can be registered without the house complying with the building code (Georgia) or with no minimum plot size required for the registration of the land (Albania). Albania is moving ahead with planning its 127 informal settlements prior to the complete development of its new national plans.

Bringing in different standards to accommodate the poor.

In the Philippines, subdivision standards were relaxed by legislation in the early 1980s to allow poor communi-

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ties to build houses with smaller floor sizes on smaller-sized plots, and to own them legally. Kenya is reviewing and discussing its building codes with the idea of developing incremental building codes like those found in Namibia, which include plan types that are affordable and suitable to the poor.

Building the capacities on both sides. Experience has shown that communities mobilized by enumeration can build links with the political leadership of the city. The political leadership in turn can encourage planning officials to adopt more inclusive planning practices, as has happened in the 300 cities participating in the Baan Mankong national slum upgrading programme in Thailand.

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GLTN Secretariat, facilitated by UN-HABITAT: Land, Tenure & Property Administration Section, PO Box 30030, Nairobi 00100, Kenya. Tel. +254 (0)20 7625199, fax +254 (0) 20 7624265, email gltn@unhabitat.org, www.gltn.net

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Impossible for the authorities to gather data without residents' cooperation: Kibera, Nairobi's largest informal settlement.

Photo: Jack Makau, Pamoja Trust, Kenya

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