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Home»Topic Guide»Informal settlementsUrban governanceWilliam Robert AvisTopic Guide, November 2016The growth of informal settlements, slums and poor residential neighborhoods is a global phenomenon accompanying the growth of the urban population. It is estimated that 25% of the world's urban population lives in informal settlements, with 213 million informal settlement populations added to the global population since 1990 (UN-Habitat, 2013b: 126-8). Informal settlements are residential areas where (UN-Habitat, 2015b; Brown, 2015): residents often have no security of tenure for the land or dwellings they inhabit , for example, they can squat or rent informally; basic services and urban infrastructure are usually lacking in the neighbourhood; housing may not comply with planning and building regulations and is often located in geographically and ecologically sensitive areas (see Thematic Guide to Providing and Improving Housing for the Poor, Patel, 2013). The emergence of informal settlements has led to a number of interrelated factors: population growth; migration between rural and urban areas; lack of affordable housing; weak governance (in particular in the areas of policy, urban planning and management); economic vulnerability and low-wage work; marginalisation; conflicts, natural disasters and climate change (UN-Habitat, 2015b). Many governments refuse to acknowledge the existence of informal settlements that undermine urban-wide sustainable development and prosperity. These settlements remain geographically, economically, socially and politically disconnected from wider urban systems and excluded from urban opportunities and decision-making (UN-Habitat, 2015f). The city government's positions on informal settlements range from opposition and evictions to unwilling tolerance and support for legalization and modernization. Modernising informal settlements through tenure adjustment and infrastructure provision is widely accepted as preferable to relocation (Devas et al., 2004), which helps maintain social and economic networks considered vital for livelihoods. Living in informal settlements disproportionately affects certain groups. Informal settlements often sit on the outskirts of urban areas and do not have access to markets and/or resources. For women, for example, this may increase the obstacles they face in accessing livelihoods. Domestic workers also face business problems (Chant, 2014). Women in informal settlements spend more time and energy accessing basic services than other urban counterparts, limiting their ability and time to earn through paid employment (UNFPA, 2007). Moreover, the predominance of male-biased land tenure policies and restrictions on women's rights to property ownership reduce the likelihood of alternative housing options. Poor quality housing or eviction and homelessness can also increase the risk of insecurity and sexual violence (Chant, 2013; McIlwaine, 2013). The Kibera map is an example of a community a project using mobile phone technology and geographic information systems (GIS) to support data collection, reporting and disclosure. The project was launched in 2009 in response to a lack of information on the informal settlement of Kibera. Community engagement included mapping informal settlements, participatory GIS meetings, and working with local organizations to identify key community issues. Citizens find and record the positions of markets, schools, religious centers, hospitals, clinics and pharmacies, toilets and water points. The first digital map of Kibera was created and made available to the public through OpenStreetMap. Maps were also created to improve the safety of women and girls, with locals noting which areas were unsafe, safe and where there were no street lights. The Kibera map also sought to strengthen the community through citizen journalism. The Voice of Kibera website was established, where residents could post stories and share information via SMS. This information was subsequently geo-localized on maps. The Map Kibera project had a tangible impact on the community and served practical purposes such as marking and monitoring polling stations (2013), placing publishing service providers, warning citizens about natural disasters and raising NGO awareness of local needs. Most importantly, Kibera is no longer invisible and now has a community of committed, qualified citizens trained to use technology to promote change. Sources: Hagen (2011: 69-94); Tavaana (nd) Combating the negative aspects of informal settlements requires governments to recognise the challenges faced by residents and actively integrate them into wider urban systems. However, the legalisation of settlements may not overcome the stigma associated with living in certain areas. Un-Habitat (2015b: 6-7) identifies a number of key drivers for action: recognition of informal settlements and human rights. Urban authorities that adopt rights-based policies and integrated governance create prosperous, sustainable and inclusive cities. The leadership of the government. National governments must provide an environment that develops and implements appropriate policies to achieve change. Government at all levels must bring together key stakeholders, use local knowledge, adopt policies and plans, and manage the development of progressive infrastructure. System and citywemery/scale approaches. Initiatives work best when they benefit from agglomeration economies; the use of innovative financing and taxes; ensure fair land management; recognise more forms of employment; reintegrate informal settlements with infrastructure and services through planning and design; clarify administrative responsibility for peri-urban areas; and carry out sensitive planning to avoid exposure to environmental risks. Integration of people and systems. Governments must develop and coordinate broader integrated frameworks based on spatial planning, legislation and funding are supported by interconnected institutional arrangements; and ensure the inclusion of marginalised groups and key stakeholders. Participation must be at the heart of this approach, ensuring an understanding of the dynamics of the economic and social community. Housing. Providing affordable and adequate housing, including on-site modernisation and avoiding forced evictions, security of tenure and livelihoods, and job creation, all play a role in the prosperity of cities. Long-term financial investment and financing options included. Sustained investment in affordable housing and modernisation programmes is essential. This includes pro-poor housing plans and financial support for all levels of government. Development of participatory, standardised and computerised data collection. Residents of informal settlements should participate in the collection of local data. Data collected at Community level must be standardised and linked to urban, regional, national and global benchmarks. Data collection must also be integrated into monitoring and evaluation processes. Mutual learning platforms. Platforms that draw on the knowledge of stakeholders should be prioritised in order to facilitate mutual learning. 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