

SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS FOR CITY DEVELOPMENT

Report of the Annual Public Policy Forum of the Cities Alliance
9-12th December 2001, Kolkata, India

Public Policy Forum

The Cities Alliance Consultative Group meets once a year in a city suggested by one of the Alliance members. A Public Policy Forum accompanies this event. In December 2001, The Public Policy Forum was held in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), at the invitation of the Government of West Bengal. The Forum was planned by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights and Slum/Shack Dwellers International with the support of the United Kingdom Government's Department for International Development (DFID) and in collaboration with slum communities and NGOs of Kolkata and the Government of West Bengal. They all worked to make the three day Public Policy Forum as innovative and successful as possible.

This was the first time that the Public Policy Forum was held in a city in a developing country and this provided an opportunity to reflect realities of that city in discussions and interactions.

The Objectives and the Challenge

The concept of the Policy Forum is to create a public event in which the whole range of actors who support city development can interact and share experiences.

This Policy Forum had three main objectives:

- ◆ For participants to interact and thereby catalyse new dialogues and incipient partnerships that will be sustained beyond the event
- ◆ To review the City Development Strategy process in comparison to a more inclusive pro-poor strategic partnerships
- ◆ To bring wider national and international experience on inclusive approaches to city development to Kolkata

The Forum was an attempt to merge the informal, people-driven networking processes of slum communities with the more formal institutional processes of international agencies and governments. In addition to visitors from 11 cities around India, participants came from 30 other countries. Together, there were more than 150 participants. Slum dwellers, NGO workers, international agency staff, academics and government representatives all mingled and discussed, sharing views and comparing experiences.



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Kolkata

The location in Kolkata enabled discussion of the theme of Sustainable Partnerships for City Development to be grounded in the reality of the urban development challenges facing Kolkata. On the first day of the Forum, the participants visited seven locations representing different challenges facing Kolkata and exemplifying different types of partnership in the city. The visits provided a very dynamic and diverse opportunity for everyone to meet, share and reflect.

Many visitors found that what they saw and heard in Kolkata had very clear resonance with what they experienced in their own cities.

The evening session of feedback, including a video presentation of the different locations and initiatives visited, gave participants a chance to discuss experiences and develop a wider view of the issues of the city.

Partnerships and Inclusion

A clear message from the Forum is that governments alone cannot solve the problems facing cities in developing countries. There are not sufficient public sector resources to deal with the problems of poverty, service provision and housing on a citywide scale. Community and private sector resources must be mobilised. Global experience

shows that the poor are innovative, enthusiastic and hardworking and, when the formal institutions fail them, they develop systems and processes of their own, whether for banking, basic service provision or housing.

Governments that continue with slum clearance, harassment and eviction are taking the "zero" option. Governments that treat the poor as partners in solving the cities problems are taking the "*zero-plus*" option. The forum heard of a number of successful "zero-plus" partnerships, going to scale, in cities around Asia.

But, such partnerships are not free from risk. There will be risks for the communities and their leaders in this sort of relationship with the state. Also there are risks for the individual government officers who must challenge normal bureaucratic procedures for such partnerships to work. The challenge is to find ways in which such processes of partnership can be institutionalised so that everybody gains.

The inauguration of the Model Housing Exhibition by the Urban Minister allowed the Forum participants to see the initiation of a dialogue between the poor of Kolkata and the city authorities. The city officials, other professionals and international visitors were guests of the community, thus changing

the normal power relations. The Kolkata pavement dwellers could interact with government officials and representatives of the donor organisations, as well as community activists from around India and from other countries in Asia.

For the Forum participants the Housing exhibition provided another valuable *reality check* as they continued discussions on partnership and city development.

Eviction

The informal evening meeting on evictions allowed frank discussion and a productive exchange of views and experiences from around Asia. It is clear that eviction is a growing problem worldwide and evictions in any city immeasurably damage emerging or tentative partnership between slum communities and the authorities.

A key message from the discussion was the need to identify eviction-prone areas in advance. This would enable slum communities to work to find solutions that avoid eviction, and which they can present as constructive alternatives to the local authorities. Suggestions to improve the ability of poor communities to negotiate with the authorities included: building up community resources through savings, communicating between groups so as to negotiate as a network and setting up an experienced task force to assist with negotiations. Using the courts and

the media to take a rights-based stand was also discussed.

This informal meeting concluded that the Cities Alliance should play a stronger role in advocacy against eviction and it should be more proactive in the promotion of "no eviction without appropriate consensual rehabilitation" in the context of the Cities Without Slums agenda. This message was conveyed to the Consultative Group of the Cities Alliance.

City Development Strategies

City Development Strategies, CDS, are a tool for cities to develop a shared vision and generate a collective action plan for equitable city growth. It is an inclusive, participatory process, bringing citizens, institutions, private sector, government and non-government together to improve the quality of life for all citizens.

The presentations and small group discussions stressed the need to truly mainstream the pro-poor approach within CDSs. City development requires sustained poverty reduction and the poor need to be brought into this process as partners. They should be involved in the whole city discussions, not just in the obviously pro-poor aspects. In this way larger macro developments, which may unthinkingly undermine the poor in the city, can be debated and



The basis for sustainable city development is the inclusion of the poor in the planning process.





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ways can be incorporated to address the needs and concerns of the poor.

There was a plea for more networking and exchange between CDS cities to ensure that lessons are shared in a way that this city development tool can become more inclusive, indeed can become a *"people's CDS"*. Although there is full support for the aims of CDSs, the different perspectives that emerged from the group discussions showed clearly that there is still a long way to go to achieve a truly inclusive approach. It is still ultimately a question of power relations.

Outcomes for Cities Alliance

The Forum showcased a range of cities in which communities are positioning themselves as active participants in development, as a force to influence urban policies and affect public investments. The Forum heard from local authorities that have, in turn, organized themselves to be more responsive and accountable to their citizens. Success was seen to emerge from creative and dynamic partnerships between organised communities and concerned local authorities.

In the feedback to the Consultative Group of Cities Alliance, the representatives of member agencies were encouraged to reflect on how international agency interventions act to support, or undermine, innovative

partnerships. Developments at city level which do not fully involve the poor, which marginalise them, or worse still, actually displace them, will undermine the growth of vital city partnerships.

The Cities Alliance Consultative Group were also asked to consider ways in which there could be more real learning between cities to undertake a CDS. With the objective of finding ways to bridge the gap between expectations of a CDS and the reality, there was perhaps a need to develop criteria for support, such as a history of good governance or creative partnership in the city.

Although three days is too short a period for all experiences to be exchanged and views to be shared, the Public Policy Forum created the conditions for people who would not otherwise meet, to get together and exchange ideas. As an attempt to explore bridges between people's processes and formal institutions, the Public Policy Forum was the start of what necessarily has to be a longer process.

Urban poverty is a **global** challenge, but cities and their citizens need to deal with it at a **local** level. Sharing these experiences and exchanging ideas and visions, helps link the **local** with the **global**. The Public Policy Forum succeeded in creating space for such connectivity. Meanwhile, the real task of making cities work, for all citizens, is an on-going and prolonged process.