

LAV Series

## LAV PEOPLE CENTERED SLUM UPGRADING: South Africa and LAC Exchange

### FIRST SESSION

Thursday 7th May 2020

15.00h-18.00h South Africa

15.00h-18.00h Brussels

14.00h-17.00h London

10.00h-13.00h Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo

08.00h-11.00h Bogota, CDMX, Lima

07.00h-10.00h Costa Rica

### CONCEPT NOTE

## APPROACHES TO INFORMAL SETTLEMENT UPGRADING IN A COVID-19 ERA

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### Background

The persistence and experience of South Africa's informal settlements have frustrated their residents and policy makers for some time. According to a 2018 report by the Socio-Economic Rights Institute, there are, at a minimum, between 2.9 and 3.6 million people living in informal settlements, in South Africa. Other data suggest that there are at least 1.2 million vulnerable households in more than 2,700 informal settlements in South Africa, that are acutely at risk – and now more particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Residents in informal settlements have a heightened risk of exposure to disease due to the acute neglect of their settlements, inadequate to no basic services or infrastructure and, as a result, limited access to adequate housing, water, sanitation, hygiene facilities and electricity.

While informal settlement upgrading is a long-term, incremental process, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an additional urgency, which has created the opportunity for more focused and targeted dialogue towards appropriate informal settlement upgrading.

We are fortunate that the policy space is conducive. The flagship Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (UISP) was acknowledged as a policy priority by the Department of Human Settlements and other key departments and entities (including Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) and National Treasury) and the need for scaling up of the programme was recognised. The National Development Plan (NDP), Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF), Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA), and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) all emphasise the importance of informal settlement upgrading and participatory approaches. At the same time, however, responses to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic have created confusion, and given rise to new challenges. The Department of Human Settlements, Water & Sanitation has adopted an approach of de-densification, to which Civil Society Organisations responded with a position paper setting out their understanding of key upgrading needs. At the same time, municipalities, NGOs and private sector entities are already utilising innovative and effective methodologies to improve the lives of informal settlement dwellers. Deeper engagement and joint learning across scales and stakeholders, and the formation of innovative partnerships at all levels, including the local level, is critical. These dynamics form the backdrop to this initiative.

To this end, the larger trajectory of upgrading informal settlements in Latin America and the Caribbean, combined with recent responses to Covid-19, might be useful for South African policy makers, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders, as they consider the strategy and tactics they each pursue to realise an appropriate approach.

In the Latin America and Caribbean region responses to Covid-19 are centred on a strong movement of grassroots, social, philanthropic organizations and their networks of solidarity to: meet the immediate needs, food and economic security and provide basic hygiene and health care and information to vulnerable populations. A group of local and national governments is active and responsive, prioritizing attention to informal settlement, in all cases the role of grassroots communities and their networks have proven to be essential for the Covid-19 responses, to (i) identify needs, (ii) map the situation, (iii) calibrate the responses, (implement interventions in precarious situations).

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In Costa Rica, a shift in recent years toward a more comprehensive, multi-stakeholder and inter-institutional approach to informal settlements has facilitated the launch of a national protocol to minimize the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The protocol mobilizes central government ministries, local governments and representatives of informal settlements to not only track and map the presence of the coronavirus, but as important, to plan for and deliver water and sanitation to the informal settlements, as well as sites for temporary housing and self-isolation. In Colombia, a concerted effort to regularize informal settlements over the years has allowed the Municipality of Bogota to integrate those settlements into city and district-level plans that guide the introduction, expansion, and funding of services and infrastructure. That experience has allowed the city to identify and work with local communities and organizers to curb the spread of the virus and ensure adequate access to water and other services, responses in Bogota include even housing improvements.

Mexico is conducting a series of multi-stakeholders debates on Covid-19 led by SEDATU (Secretary for Agrarian and Urban Territorial Development) with support of Cities Alliance among other agencies, on a thematic set that includes low income housing, informal settlements, mobility, metropolitan governance with the objective of mapping out local responses and identify means of support from the national government, including potential review of the legal framework. There is a clear view from the side of the national government that this is time for a radical paradigm shift on how urban planning has been pursued in the country<sup>1</sup>.

Other national governments such as Argentina, Colombia and Chile are pursuing a wide range of strategies encompassing the housing sector as a whole that includes (i) moratoriums for payment of services and utilities, rent and mortgages, (ii) establishment of guarantee and social protection schemes; (iii) measures to protect and boost the construction sector as a whole; aiming to protect the lowest income households from the economic impacts of the pandemic and simultaneously already establish the grounds for counter-cyclical measures and economic recovery.

Many of these measures are oriented not only towards responding to Covid-19, but rather beyond, understanding that in a region with 40 years' experience in slum upgrading it is no longer reasonable to accept that a significant part of its population doesn't have access to basic services as water, leaves at high levels of vulnerability and can't attend to the public health guidelines of staying at home, simply for not having one or due to its precarious and dense conditions. Argentina has started a process to identify available land and structure a public land bank to attend needs of new housing complementing slum upgrading efforts with new operations funded by the Interamerican Development Bank and the World Bank led both by national and local governments.

A series of debates in form of "Laboratorios de Vivienda (LAVs)<sup>2</sup>" have been conducted at the sub-regional and regional levels in LAC, and as a result of a recent LAV held on the 22<sup>th</sup> of April, national governments from the Central American Region signed a joint declaration for the regional reconstruction, with the

<sup>1</sup> As stated by Secretary Roman Meyer from SEDATU at the launching of the Covid-19 debates on 16<sup>th</sup> of April. <https://www.facebook.com/175326165978876/videos/1586316218188570/>

<sup>2</sup> Housing Laboratories in English, are a component of the wider knowledge platform known as the Urban Housing Practitioners Hub or UHPH, an open platform for the exchange, gathering and dissemination of practices, knowledge, and stakeholders working around housing and urban habitat in Latin America and the Caribbean.- <https://www.uhph.org/en/sign-in>

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objective to jointly (...) *design mechanisms, in order to mitigate the damage and also to lay the foundations for a sustainable recovery and social reconstruction.*

*(...) And to the central importance of **developing informal settlements** as a key opportunity for social integration, an inclusive and resilient urban regeneration that generates added value to all levels and make use of the construction sector for employment creation and economic development on the territory. Equally, the access of adequate housing will be promoted within an integrated system of infrastructure, services and quality public space.<sup>3</sup>(...)*

## Objectives of the Project

Against this background, a Housing Laboratory or ‘LAB’ focused on informal settlement upgrading in the context of COVID-19 will be held in South Africa in May and June of 2020. The LAB will establish a platform for exchange between LAC practitioners to share their experiences with South Africans working on informal settlement upgrading. The first of a set of three to four exchanges is scheduled for 7 May 2020.

The LAB will adopt the methodology of debate developed in the Latin America and Caribbean region premised on multi-stakeholder, horizontal and equal participation; practitioners and researchers that simultaneously share experiences and contribute to the debate and directions to an agreed set of questions that integrates a collectively built concept note. It is primarily a space for deep reflection and exchange about issues related to housing, informal settlements, and habitat.

The overarching purpose of this LAB is to identify strategies and tactics for local government and civil society organisations to engage constructively in support of an appropriate short to medium term approach to informal settlements upgrading in South Africa, that also incorporates a response to the particular impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. To this end, the focus of the dialogue is on experiential exchange, around a series of key questions. Participants will share knowledge, experiences, good practices and technical assistance on ongoing policy developments, local government implementation efforts, and current programmes and projects to support an appropriate COVID-19 response for informal settlements.

The LAC experiences that will be shared are underpinned by the notion of the ‘right to the city’ as it is emphasised in the New Urban Agenda, highlighting the need to critically engage with the relationship between COVID-19 responses and wider processes shaping the production of social and environmental justice in the city. The right to the city perspective aims to support exchanges and dialogue by calling on reflections on how policy and planning responses contribute to the integration and materialization of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights. In the context of informal settlements, the right to the city perspective emphasises the need to address the socio-political discrimination created by spatial exclusion, which continue to produce inequalities in South African cities. Furthermore, this perspective also hopes to promote particular principles and instruments to advance to address such

<sup>3</sup> Available at: <https://www.sisca.int/comunicaciones2/noticias/1183-centroamerica-prepara-plan-de-recuperacion-reconstruccion-social-y-resiliencia-ante-la-covid-19>.

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issues, such as the promotion of the social function of land, property and the city (New Urban Agenda), as well as democratic governance of the city.

By evaluating the various strategies that have been put forward by government and the responses from practitioners and civil society there is an opportunity to critically review these against emerging lessons and experiences from LAC, and other contexts, where the COVID-19 pandemic has taken hold. This initiative has the possibility to contribute to further learning, research, documentation, data and information on short term emergency actions and medium-term measures to ensure that responses are context appropriate and locally responsive.

## Framework for Discussion and Key Questions

The LAB will enable a dialogue between South Africa and Latin American actors to contribute towards the identification of immediate and appropriate, strategic responses to the crisis of informal settlements and the particular issues brought on by COVID-19, as well as a reflection on how these immediate measures can pave the grounds for permanent changes in the post pandemic. The following questions will guide the discussion:

1. How have your policies and programs targeting informal settlements informed your approach to the COVID crisis and to what extent do you think they have helped or strengthened your interventions to date?
2. Density in informal settlements has risen higher on the agenda in the wake of the COVID-19 virus as a potential area of concern for driving infection rates. Responses include de-densification and resultant relocation, including temporary housing, among other measures, to address health concerns. What can be learnt from approaches that have been implemented in Latin America in addressing density?
3. To what extent is the governance environment (policies, processes, institutions) impeding progress towards informal settlement upgrading? How effectively are national government policies implemented by local government structures? What types of governance mechanisms can be explored particularly at local government and city level that are more attuned to upgrading efforts? How are capacity issues at local government level addressed to support government officials? Are there examples of responsive and innovative regulatory and institutional mechanisms and approaches that can be shared and that also relate to difference spheres of government in strengthening settlement upgrading?
4. How to build and sustain relations between sector actors, including government, at all levels, for more effective coordinated action to identify appropriate strategies to achieve common objectives for informal settlement upgrading? What has been the LAC experience?

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5. What rental approaches with their relatively clearer tenure status should be pursued on a larger scale (obviously has policy and financial implications)? This follows on from the discussion on density and introduces the right to the city and social function of property/housing/land.

The first LAB, scheduled for 7 May 2020, will include presentations by the National Government of Costa Rica, and the NGO Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia - ACIJ in Buenos Aires in Argentina (Global Platform to the Right to the City), as well as participants from Brazil, Colombia, and Chile. This first discussion will create the basis for defining an agenda for further experience-sharing and discussion, that will then take place over a further two or three LABs with the objective to extend and incorporate to the discussion other stakeholders such as local governments, academia, private sector.