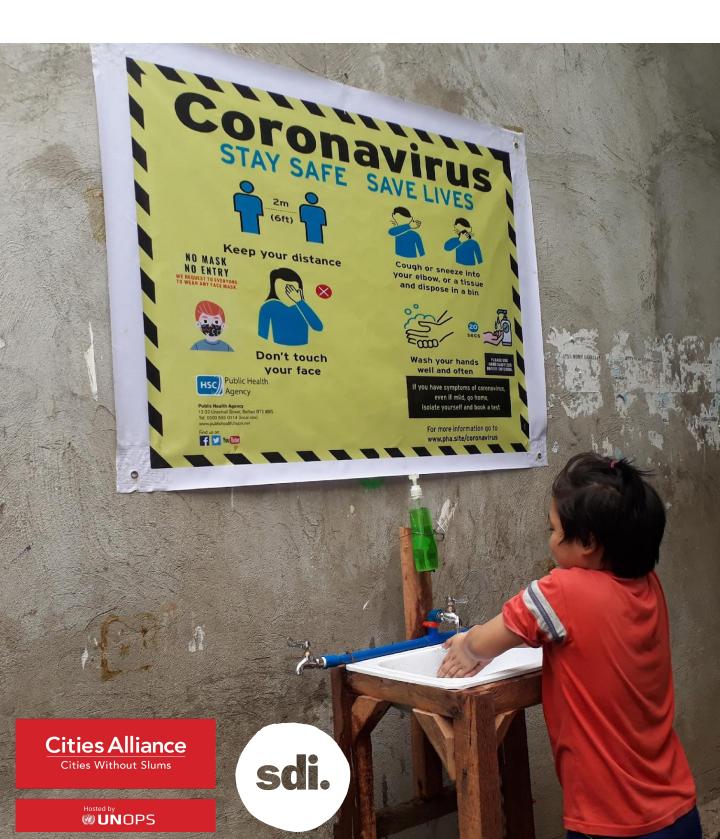# From Recovery to Resilience

Community-led Responses to Covid-19 in Informal Settlements

About the project.

In 2020, as Covid-19 spread rapidly across the cities where SDI is active, federations recognised the need for both urgent responses to the acute humanitarian crises facing their communities and longer-term strategies to engage with government and other stakeholders to address the prolonged effects of this global crisis. Through a partnership supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), Cities Alliance, and Slum Dwellers International (SDI) were able to channel much needed resources to organised communities of the urban poor in 17 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America to facilitate these processes.

Since early 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic and pandemic responses such as government lockdowns have highlighted and exacerbated many of the chronic stresses urban poor communities live with and struggle against daily. As such, the strategies supported by this SDI / Cities Alliance partnership are about more than Covid-19 response and recovery: they are about sustainable, inclusive, and pro-poor urban development that provides communities with meaningful opportunities to work with government and other stakeholders to address issues such as food security, access to livelihood opportunities, skills training, and basic services like water and sanitation, as well as the need for accurate slum data to drive government responses in times of crisis.

SDI's urban poor federations have shown that they have the social networks and systems in place to respond efficiently and effectively to disasters and chronic stressors. They have demonstrated their critical role to governments and development partners as reliable actors at the forefront of provision of information on and services to the most vulnerable.

Indeed, with lockdowns and government restrictions, many external organisations were

Philippines SDI affiliate

unable to access the vulnerable communities where SDI federations live and work, highlighting the immense value of working directly with these communities.

The examples provided in this document highlight how federations have the information, knowledge, and skills to work with government and other stakeholders to implement effective, scalable solutions to chronic and acute urban challenges.

Zimbabwe SDI affiliate

Liberia SDI affiliate

Improved public health and safety

Many residents in slums live in overcrowded homes without access to on-site water or sanitation and face the constant threat of forced eviction. This means that preventative Covid-19 measures such as handwashing, disinfecting, physical distancing, and quarantine are often impossible for the urban poor.

- In Ghana, the federation was able to identify and map Covid-19 hotspots. Community members were trained to manufacture and install hand washing stations for community use within these hotspots. Additionally, the grant enabled the installation of in-yard water connections to poor and vulnerable households in slums/informal settlements to increase access to water supply.

- In Zambia, the federation was able to support provisional WASH interventions and set precedents for water provision to slum communities through community-led processes. Through the provision of water storage and hand-washing facilities in slums, communities are now able to regularly wash their hands in public places and this also enabled market committees to enforce preventive regulations since the infrastructure to wash hands is now available. At the household level the Zambia Alliance identified 75 women with health vulnerabilities who are at greater risk when collecting water from congested public taps. Additionally, through engagement meetings with water trusts and utility companies the federation was able to lobby for pro-poor water subsidies.

BRIDGING KNOWLEDGE AND PPE GAPS IN TANZANIA

There was a gap in knowledge on Covid-19 awareness, especially in informal settlements. Through this project, federation teams have been able to provide support to ensure that communities and schools awareness and knowledge on the pandemic is enhanced and precautions are being taken against the pandemic. This went hand in hand with the provision of hand washing facilities and PPE in places which had no facilities such as in marketplaces and schools.

This has contributed to behavior change in terms of improving hygiene as a way to stop the spread of Covid-19. Communities now have the knowledge and facilities to wash hands. Correct information sharing around Covid-19 has helped groups such as boda boda drivers (motorcycle taxis), food vendors, and school children which had limited access to information about the pandemic. Interactions with such groups provided an opportunity for them to ask questions and seek clarifications, which enhanced their understanding on prevention and treatment methods.

Another significant outcome is the recognition of the Tanzanian SDI Alliance as a partner in addressing pandemics by the government. This has improved the relationship and established new ones with other units/departments within the municipalities such as the public health unit and the regional office. These relationships will help to provide more engagement and opportunities for the federation, and the Alliance in general as well to discuss and negotiate further interventions related to the health and public safety of people living in informal settlements. The pandemic has taught us lessons on hygiene promotion, in particular hand washing behaviors, which is a serious issue the community needs to practice beyond the pandemic.

The federation led the process of planning and implementation of these activities and interventions. This included gathering information from different groups on the pandemic, identifying needs, and supporting awareness as facilitators in schools, markets, households, and settlements.

Tanzania SDI affiliate

Zimbabwe SDI affiliate

Namibia SDI affiliate

Enhanced livelihoods

Despite the negative effect and impact to individuals, communities, and countries the Covid-19 response actions have also brought opportunities with them. Some which came as a result of this programme are income generating projects, for example liquid soap-making and sewing of reusable face masks respectively have equipped community members with skills which some families are now using to earn a living.

- Federation members in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe were trained in sewing reusable face masks and the production of liquid soap and sanitizers.

- In Malawi, federation women and youth trained in design and tailoring produced and distributed 17,300 reusable face masks to vulnerable members of the community and primary school going children.

- In Namibia, Philippines, and Sierra Leone, federations members were trained in permaculture and supported to establish urban community gardens.

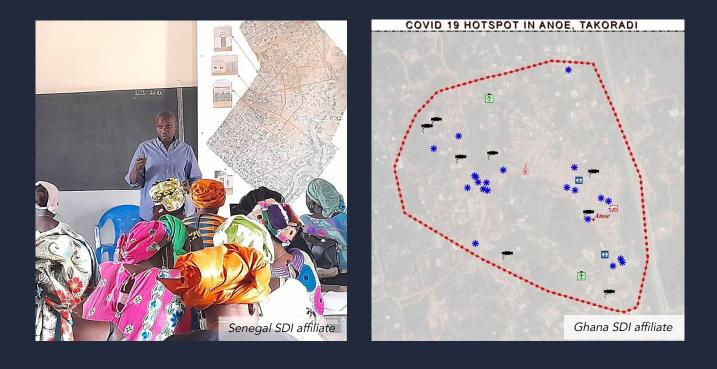## BUILDING RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS IN ZAMBIA

The Zambia SDI Alliance facilitated trainings to capacitate slum dwellers with skills necessary to build resilient livelihoods. The trainings were conducted in two typologies namely sack gardening/organic farming and metal fabrication.

Sack gardening involves the use of biodegradable waste in urban agriculture to provide nutritional support and sustainable livelihoods. At household level, sack gardens significantly reduced food shortages and helped in reducing garbage that has been indiscriminately disposed of in informal settlements, thereby creating healthy and safe environments. Sack gardens have a lower production cost as their main input is organic waste, which is readily available in informal settlements. The sack gardening enterprise consumes about 20 tons of organic waste in a month and with the plans to scale up production, the enterprises will be a significant consumer of garbage being produced in informal settlements.

Besides the environmental benefits of the enterprises, slum dwellers secured resilient livelihoods that are set to provide employment to more slum dwellers when the intervention is scaled up.

Metal fabrication training also brought some positive changes to youths, as it created an opportunity for them to create products that are on demand as well as helping their communities to meet their demands. Currently the enterprise has been instrumental in harnessing fabrication techniques for Covid-19 prevention. The enterprise created a touch-less hand washing facility that has special features to avoid contact with the facility. The facilities have since been distributed into public spaces as well as for other interested organizations. The enterprise has created a viable livelihood for the unemployed youths and this intervention will continue into all settlements to create local technology that can easily be managed and maintained locally.
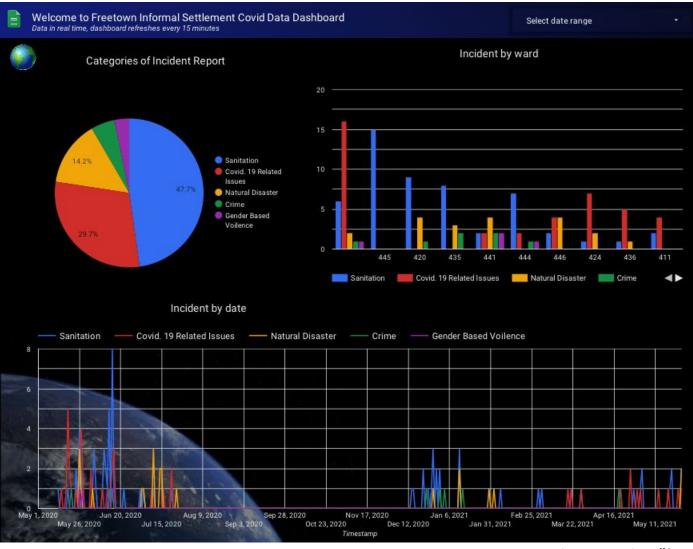

Zambia SDI affiliate

Senegal SDI affiliate

COVID 19 HOTSPOT IN ANOE, TAKORADI

Ghana SDI affiliate

Pro-poor data driven development

SDI affiliates adapted Know Your City profiling and mapping tools to gather household and settlement level data on the impacts of Covid-19 on the urban poor.

• In the Philippines, the federation undertook a vulnerability mapping of 22 communities in which localized Covid-19 hotspot maps were produced and included the identification of households with vulnerable groups such as seniors, children, persons with disabilities, and pregnant women.

• In Botswana, the federation interviewed 33 savings groups to gather information on how Covid-19 has impacted the livelihoods and savings of urban poor communities. Findings revealed that many members stopped saving due to loss of employment and income. Most of the small businesses collapsed during the first lockdown and many of the street vendors that would travel across the border to buy their goods were no longer able to work with borders being closed. Students also faced hardships due to disruptions in education. Findings also showed that schools not only provide education but also provide students with social development skills. The pandemic has contributed to an increase in psychological and economic pressure leaving many without jobs or the ability to put food on the table, which has also highlighted the spike in gender-based violence.

- In Zimbabwe, youth were trained on data collection tools used to collect information on the level of awareness and community preparedness to Covid-19 as well as the pandemic's impact on community members in terms of livelihoods, housing, and WASH.

- The Sierra Leone SDI Alliance, in consultation with Freetown City Council (FCC), developed an app (FISCOVIDATA) and live dashboard in which communities can identify hotspots and link to government service providers in real time. The mobile app and dashboard provides two-way communication - it relays information to appropriate authorities and notifies communities of actions taken. Piloted in 10 specific slums, this community-based approach has proven that empowering communities to mobilise actions for response and mitigation of health pandemics is an effective way to mitigate the spread. This resulted in the reversal of the spread of Covid-19 in these settlements. This work has attracted the interest of other partners, namely Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) and College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences (COMAHS) to collaboratively work with DICOVERC to develop the app further so as to intervene in any future health emergencies.

Sierra Leone SDI affiliate

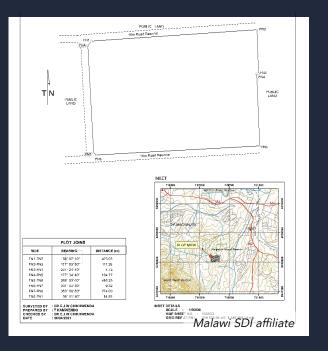# USING COMMUNITY DATA TO IMPROVE BASIC SERVICE ACCESS IN INDIA

As part of this project, slum profiling and collecting data on community toilets was undertaken from 10 settlements across 10 cities. While conducting these profiles, Mahila Milan leaders realized the different issues communities are facing in the area of water, sanitation, drainage, jobs, etc. They found out which settlements have or lack access to toilets, what water facilities are available to residents, what mechanisms are in place to collect garbage, and how people are dealing with job issues.

In Pimpri, Mahila Milan leader Rehana highlighted how in one of the settlements the community toilet that was constructed in 2018 was neither connected to the main sewer line nor was maintained properly which meant people were facing difficulties using the toilet. The women in the settlement approached the local councilor, spoke to him about the problem, and sought his support to fix it. In her own settlement, the drainage water enters people's homes especially during the rains giving rise to many water borne diseases and skin infections. The dirty water from the community toilet as well as drainage water from individual houses is let out into one drainage line that causes this problem. They have been approaching the local councilor for the last five months but there was no relief. They again visited the local councilor and said: "if you don't take it up then we will have to approach the ward. We work for an NGO and are aware of all the processes and procedures that need to be done to sort out issues." They then communicated with the health department in the ward office, did site visits,

and within eight days they had laid down new drainage pipes. Six such pipes need to be laid down in the settlement in different places which will be completed soon.

Similarly, the Mahila Milan leaders from Surat were facing drainage issues where water would overflow onto the roads and into the homes. Coordinating and negotiating with the local councilor and ward, they were able to resolve the problem.

In both cities these problems arose during lockdown and community members could not travel to the ward office. However, the Mahila Milan women were adamant to resolve their problems and so they started communicating with the officials via phone on a daily basis until the problem was resolved. At times the officials try to avoid these women, don't take their calls, and say they forgot what it was about, but the women say "even if we have to call them 100 times, we do that and should keep doing it". This is a way of showing how serious the organization and communities are about resolving their own issues, how accountable the leaders feel for their own settlement and people, and how this can be a means of strengthening their relationship with the city and authorities. The end result has been that these women are now called by the city to help them with certain programs or implementing schemes that benefit the city as well as communities. They also get an opportunity to start thinking of upgrading their settlements in different ways.

Malawi SDI affiliate

Brazil SDI affiliate

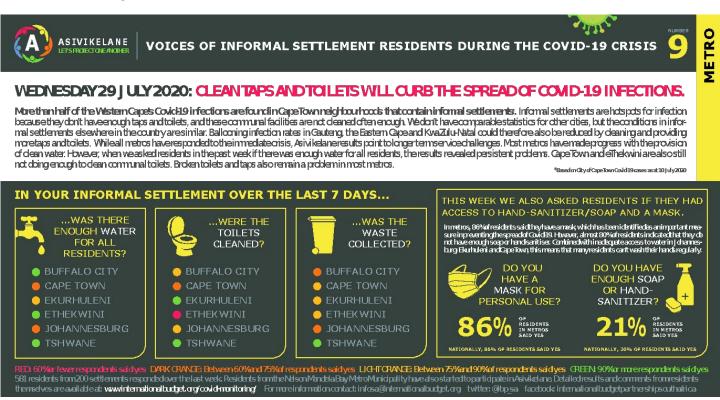# Institutional collaboration between the urban poor and government

The need to address basic services, health needs, and decent shelter is critical in the Covid-19 fight and this project supported communities to highlight their plight and push for meaningful change. Applying rules created for the formal city into an informal settlement is challenging and may paralyze the action. Agreements need to be reached and governments need to find flexibility on policies and regulations so that formal interventions can take place in informal settlements.

- SDI affiliates in Brazil and Malawi were able to use this project to make strides towards improving the tenure security of informal dwellers. In São Paulo, Brazil a training was held for federation leaders on issues of land regularization alongside the formation of a network that can continue dialogue with local governments on issues of security of tenure.

- In Malawi the project supported communities in Blantyre and Lilongwe to improve their security of tenure by obtaining title deeds for individual plots. In Blantyre, the project supported the community of Angelo-Goveya to undertake regularization of their settlement. This settlement is made up of a low-cost housing scheme with 460 housing units sitting on 12 hectares of land. This piece of land was provided by the Ministry of Housing to the Federation. The challenge facing the community was that while the land was offered to the people, there was no process to actually transfer the land to the local authority – the Blantyre City Council (BBC), as described by laws governing land in the country. Thus in principle the people are living as if they are encroachers because there is no documentation in place to support their habitation and use of the land.

The project has conducted individual plot surveys and supported the community in producing 465 deed plans that facilitated the transfer of land from the central ministry to BCC. Additionally, the federation through this project has advocated for the reduction of regularization chargers by more than 50% and allowing plot owners to pay in instalments. On the other hand, the settlements that are being supported in the City of Lilongwe are living on private land. They have been living with constant threats of eviction from their landlords. Discussions with the city council resolved to regularise the settlements and to provide land titles to all the affected families. The Malawi Alliance, in partnership with the Council, lobbied the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development on the reduction of regularisation chargers. The Ministry issued a waiver and further instructed the council to use discretion when issuing the chargers. The chargers have been reduced from MK 1,000,000 (U$ 1,250) to an average of MK 400,000 (U$ 510). These processes are expected to benefit 500 families.

• In South Africa, the Federation in the North West province started to implement the Asivikelane campaign in October 2021. The campaign collects data about basic service delivery (water, sanitation, and waste removal) in 21 informal settlements and uses this information to pressurize local municipalities to deliver. Fifteen settlements were mobilized to select 35 representatives to join a meeting with the Madibeng Administrator, the Department of Electricity, the Department of Human Settlements, and the Housing Development Agency as a united front.

Through multiple engagements, the SA SDI Alliance is now in the process of signing an official MOU with the Madibeng municipality that will bind the municipality to the working partnership with the Federation in terms of addressing informal settlement upgrading, housing delivery, and formalizing structures.

South Africa SDI affiliate

PARTNERING WITH GOVERNMENT TO CLEAN UP SETTLEMENTS IN MALAWI

Ntopwa is an informal settlement in the City of Blantyre with a population of over 4,000 people where more than 70% of the population are tenants. As part of Covid-19 response project, the community conducted a situational analysis and the results confirmed the most pronounced challenges related to issues of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) – including waste management. Their report revealed that most families do not have toilets and that toilets are shared by more than four families. Open defecation practices are rampant. Wastewater from kitchens and bathrooms is not properly directed. It further revealed that the settlement has three water kiosks, two of which are not functional. The area has no designated waste dumping site and the Blantyre City Council (BCC) does not provide waste collection services in the settlement. Waste is disposed of anywhere and the river that runs across the settlement is choked by household solid waste. Research further revealed that poor sanitation and hygiene practices contribute to high cases of malaria and cholera is a perennial occurrence.

The community, through the Ward Development Committee (WDC), decided to come together to find sustainable solutions to their challenges. Data was collected and interventions were prioritized. The community started the implementation of their plans by passing community by-laws on a number of issues. Some of the by-laws provided for a designated community waste dumping site, mandatory for landlords to construct improved toilets for their houses, and houses without toilets will be liable to fines.

In a bid to improve solid waste management the community leadership has established a designated waste management center. All solid waste is supposed to be dumped at the site. Plans are underway to train community members – women and youth – in recycling. This will be their source of livelihood. Discussions are underway for BCC to start collecting the remaining waste. The community leadership has also accepted the position of guarantor for all families that are interested in accessing loans for the construction of improved toilets. Since this arrangement was made 50 toilets have been constructed – servicing more than 300 people. The toilets have a bathroom attachment, a handwashing facility, and a-soak-a-way pit. This has greatly reduced cases of open defecation and the community has improved its sanitation and hygiene conditions. The community expects that in the near future cases of malaria and cholera will also reduce.

Malawi SDI affiliate

Looking forward:
from recovery to resilience

Across the SDI network, organised communities of the urban poor and their support organisations have effectively and strategically responded to Covid-19 in ways that address the real and urgent needs of their communities and contribute meaningfully to the development of more robust partnerships with government, more inclusive planning, and more resilient urban development.

We need to ensure that this project serves as a catalyst for additional support, strengthening federations to establish effective partnerships with governments on their needs and priorities, such as livelihoods – a clear need identified by affiliates across the network.

Ghana SDI affiliate

> "It is imperative that future designs of post Covid-19 recovery projects include elements of capital for small scale businesses. These funds could be allowed to revolve to reach out to more people. We believe that building back better shall involve strengthening the resilience of urban poor populations."
>
> Malawi SDI affiliate

Covid-19 has highlighted the interconnectedness of our communities, demonstrating the clear need to engage all urban residents in responses to acute and chronic stressors. We hope that this project serves to further position SDI federations as central actors in resilient city planning, laying the groundwork for continued joint planning and development between organized communities of the urban poor, government, and other critical urban development stakeholders.

South Africa SDI affiliate

With support from: