# UNIVERSITY of BRADFORD

# Cities and the Capability Approach

| Item Type | Book chapter |
|---|---|
| Authors | Anand, Prathivadi B. |
| Citation | Anand PB (2018) Cities and the Capability Approach. In: Comim F et al (Eds) New Frontiers of the Capability Approach. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press: 519-548. |
| Rights | © 2018 Cambridge University Press. This material has been published in Frontiers in capability approach edited by Comim F et al. This version is free to view and download for personal use only. Not for re-distribution, re-sale or use in derivative works. |
| Download date | 29/03/2019 12:32:27 |
| Link to Item | http://hdl.handle.net/10454/13082 |

**Cities and the Capability Approach**

PB Anand

University of Bradford

Final Version of Chapter in Comim F et al (2017) Frontiers of capability approach, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.



Abstract

This chapter is an attempt at reflecting on applying the capability approach to cities and the challenges of inclusive and sustainable cities. The chapter starts with a brief literature review of some of the previous studies that have attempted to extend capability approach and human development thinking to urban issues. Then the chapter proceeds to look at a number of urban and city issues from the lens of expanding substantive freedoms. The paper includes analysis of evidence on life expectancy and living in urban areas. Some conclusions are identified.

## 1. Introduction

The capability approach is about human flourishing. We cannot think of human flourishing without thinking about cities and that has been so throughout the history from the ancient civilisations to twenty-first century societies. According to the World Urbanisation Prospects, 54 per cent of people live in urban areas in 2014 and this proportion is likely to reach 66 per cent by 2050 (UN,2014). The world urban population is estimated to increase from 3.9 billion in 2014 to over 6.3 billion in 2050. Much of that increase is likely to take place in Asia and Africa. The report also notes that: "...as the world continues to urbanize, sustainable development challenges will be increasingly concentrated in cities, particularly in the lower-middle- income countries where the pace of urbanization is fastest." The document also notes that "in many countries there is a positive relationship between the level of urbanisation and the national per capita income" but the mechanisms are complex and far from

straight forward (UN, 2014:82). Cities can be drivers of structural change and a significant increase in productivity but the prevalence of slums and unorganised sector suggest that the benefits of such structural change do not necessarily reach everyone automatically. Worldwide 880 million people (about 25 per cent of urban population) live in slums (UN-HABITAT, 2016:p15). The share of the unorganised sector in non-agricultural employment can be as high as 50 per cent (ILO, 2013).

Traditional concepts of agglomeration economies suggest that productivity advantage of urban areas is not merely due to economies of scale but due to interactions. Following the work of Bettencourt and West (2010) and recent work of the MIT's Human Dynamics Lab (Pan et al, 2013), there is now evidence to suggest that the density of human interactions ('super-ties') has a direct impact on innovation and productivity. Much of the recent research on cities (Glaeser, 2012; Batty, 2013, Goldstein and Dyson, 2013; Townsend, 2014; Goldsmith and Crawford, 2014, McLaren and Agyeman, 2015) focuses on cities in the advanced economies with considerable research gaps when it comes to cities in the lower and middle income countries. The Sustainable Development Goal 11 exhorts all those concerned to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. What makes a city to be innovative, inclusive and sustainable? Why are some cities better than others in particular aspects such as innovation, social mobility and equality? What role can city-level analysis and tools play in advancing our understanding of important social issues of our times in an urbanising world?

Capability approach offers some insights in thinking about these issues. However, there is fairly limited literature on applying the capability approach to cities and the issues of urban public policy and urban management. Compared to the vast and emerging literature on the capability approach or its applications to understanding poverty in its multiple dimensions; informing policy on inequalities and theoretical and philosophical perspectives, the extent of literature on cities and capabilities is rather thin. For example, the twenty four Global Human Development Reports by UNDP so far have focused on important aspects of human development each year but the topic of cities or urban living has not yet merited as the central theme of a global human development report. That is not to say that cities and urban issues are not discussed in the global HDRs but that cities have not yet been seen as warranting the central focus. Even among the national human development reports, cities and urban areas have not been the central focus. One exception is the 2013 National Human Development Report of China.

In this chapter, I shall provide a selective review of the literature on applying the capability approach to cities (in section 2) but my main aim is to explore a number of potential areas for applying the capability approach in relation to cities as a starting point and invitation for others to join in this quest. In section three I shall consider some aspects of cities where we could apply the capability approach and draw some conclusions in the final section.

**2. Cities and the capability approach: A selective review**

There are existing arguments concerning human rights and urban living (HABITAT) and also well-established arguments on the 'right to the city'. Even though the word city or town does not appear even once in the entire text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, various aspects of the rights such as right to life and liberty (article 3), equality before law and freedom from discrimination (articles 1, 6 and 7), right to protection of privacy, family and home (article 12), right to freedom of movement (article 13), right to own property (article 17), right to freedom of thought and religion (article 18), right to freedom of opinion and expression (article 19), right to freedom of peaceful assembly (article 20), right to participate in government (article 21), right to work and related choice of employment and leisure (articles 23 and 24), right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being (article 25), right to education (article 26) and right to participate in the cultural and scientific aspects of society (article 27) are all relevant to cities. In fact, cities may be natural grounds for articles 19 and 20. The International Covenants provide further articulation of many of these rights.

However, while these rights exist on paper and in the minds of constitutional experts, we do know that urban living especially for the poor people and many others involves serious compromises. While it is clear that rights should not be ordered or prioritised (in the sense that all of them are important), the urban poor households and communities are forced to choose some rights while they lose other rights.  The capability approach offers insights to understand these issues from the perspectives of freedoms and what should be the basis for evaluation. These include well-being and agency freedoms, process and opportunity aspects and institutions including deliberative public reasoning and the articulation of duty-bearer institutions whenever any rights are created.

As Sen (1985, 1992, 2004, 2009) pointed out there are distinct classes of freedoms and focusing too much on well-being freedoms without adequate consideration of agency freedoms can be misleading. The capability approach encourages us to think deeply about the nature of evaluation of alternative sets of beings and doings and the informational space in which such evaluation is being done. A narrow focus on well-being freedoms may appear to be helpful in producing concrete and clear priorities for policies. However, there are significant challenges about paternalism, public reasoning, how different public resources are prioritised. The importance of agency freedoms and the ability of each individual citizen to focus on things that she values and has reason to value.

New lenses to examine old urban challenges open up new ways of governance. The Mayor of Cali, Columbia in the 1990s pioneered the use of epidemiological approaches to analyse the causes of urban violence and since then WHO has recognised urban violence as a public health problem (Gurrero and Eastman, nd).

Another case is of Mayor Mockus of Bogota who used innovative ideas to inform people and use their knowledge to reduce water consumption or improve compliance with traffic laws (Caballero, 2004). More recently, another Mayor of Bogota, Enrique Penalosa challenged received wisdom that transit problems in big cities require rapid rail transit and used rapid bus networks and dedicated cycle lanes to encourage a more sustainable urban transit system. Mahila Milan and SPARC in Mumbai, India promoted innovations by empowering slum-dwellers to work together (Patel and Mitlin,2001). Lawyers in Delhi used human rights to plead the Supreme Court to intervene to reduce air pollution (Narayan and Bell, 2005). These examples highlight citizen agency (ability to act) and the use of network based approaches to resolve complex and large scale problems. However, urban violence and riots suggest that we should be cautious about collective action and co-operation (a potential criticism of McLaren and Agyeman, 2015- see Ellard, 2015).

A. *Removing unfreedoms*: An influential report that aims to apply the capability approach to cities and urban governance is the edited volume titled *Removing Unfreedoms* (Samuels, 2005). This builds on previous work by Khosla (2002). The cover page and blurb proclaim that this was the first attempt to apply the capability approach to urban development. The various authors of papers propose and use the so called 'five freedoms' framework as proposed by Sen (1999:10). The five freedoms are: (a) political freedoms including ability to participate in public discussions and in governance through elections; (b) economic 'facilities' including protections related to openness of labour markets, property and access; (c) freedom for social 'opportunities' including good health, basic education, gender equity; (d) transparency guarantees including absence of corruption and access to police protection; and  (e) protective security including emergency facilities, shelters and mechanisms to support victims of disasters etc. This is no doubt an interesting framework and the so called five dimensions cover a 'list' of various important mechanisms related to freedoms.

However, the framework can be criticised for lumping together certain aspects which are causes or determinants and others which are effects or consequences. For example, under political freedoms, the list includes forums for free debate, facilities to scrutinise authorities and ability to participate in public discussions is listed as a distinct aspect from citizen's participation (which can be an effect of there being forums for participation). Similarly under economic 'facilities' (rather than freedoms) are mentioned open labour markets and access to product markets along with stable business ethics. Transparency guarantees underpin both political freedoms and economic security and they cannot exist outside political freedoms. Under transparency guarantees, the list mentions absence of corruption which may be a result of such transparency guarantees (rather than an element of it) and the functioning of political institutions including facilities to scrutinise authorities. The dimension of protective security mainly focuses on the ways to deal with the consequences of vulnerability rather than to reduce vulnerability itself or increase resilience. Thus, the first criticism is that in the framework presented in Samuels (2005), at causes and effects are lumped

4

together. Not distinguishing between causes and effects can lead to confusion for public policy purposes.

The second criticism is related to a similar confusion that is also visible in the blurb that explains the framework:

> "All five **instruments** are interconnected and equally important. They are like the five equally important sides of a box in which urban investments can be contained. Success is measured by the degree to which obstructions are removed and each has to be tackled in the development process. In other words, development will inevitably get distorted if only one or two of these objectives are given a priority by using the argument that some of the freedoms can come afterwards." (emphasis added- cited from URL: http://www.removingunfreedoms.org/five_freedoms.htm)

Dimensions have now become instruments in the blurb whereas in the book they are not referred as instruments (Samuels, 2005:50). This can also be problematic in applying this framework for policy purposes. Many of the freedoms are intrinsically important (such as freedom to live a life with dignity) while others are instrumental to such healthy and long life. It seems that the authors of the report interpret Sen's arguments against prioritising between various freedoms to mean the lack of necessity to distinguish between instrumental and intrinsic nature of different freedoms.

Also slightly worrying is the concern whether the framework outlined in that report which predates the 2008 financial crisis had a rather benign view of the role of markets (and the importance given to free labour markets and access to product markets). Though the authors of the report do not make the mistake of linking freedoms with liberalism, others applying the framework could easily fall in that trap. Thus, while it is not a weakness of the arguments in the report, the third criticism of the report is that it would have been prudent to guard against the possible incorrect application of the framework to justify liberal and neoliberal urban development policies.

While the claim of the authors that it is the first attempt to apply the capability approach to urban development (since 2002) may indeed be valid, previous studies do exist on applying it to particular aspects of urban inequalities including my own earlier work on applying entitlements and capabilities framework to the case of inequalities in access to urban water supply (Anand and Perman, 1999; Anand, 2001 and more fully developed in Anand, 2007). Thus, the fourth criticism is that the report and the framework do not take note of other applications of the capability approach in full flourish by this time with first generation of the 'Cambridge capabilitiy conferences' (2001 to 2005) and other emerging forums.

The fifth criticism is that though the report focuses a lot more on Sen, it appears to have been influenced equally by way of Martha Nussbaum's capabilities

approach of identifying and listing essential freedoms but this is not made evident.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, the report did make some early contributions to the application of the capability approach to urban development issues but these need to be considered in relation to significant advances happening with regard to the capability approach and its applications through the national human development reports.

B. *Cities and human development*: China's National Human Development Report (UNDP, 2013) is an example of a national report that focuses on urban issues from a human development perspective. The title of the report 'sustainable and liveable cities: towards ecological civilisation' captures the vision of the report which notes that by 2012 already the rate of urbanisation was 52 per cent and some 700 million Chinese citizens lived in cities and urban areas and by 2030 this is likely to increase to urbanisation of 70 per cent by when a billion Chinese citizens will live in cities and urban areas. China's urbanisation was powered by rural to urban migration. The report notes that migrants who by 2010 numbered some 230 million were typically younger in age, had lower income than non-migrants and took up low skilled jobs. While urbanisation and industrialisation absorbed all this labour and produced enormous economic growth that lifted several hundreds of million Chinese citizens out of poverty, concerns about social welfare, environmental impacts including the quality of air and water resource requirements are recognised in the report as important issues. The report notes that air pollution may be the leading cause of death in China now (p.30). Though the report does not refer to the capability approach, one of the main issues it identifies is about the lack of rights of migrants and not integrating them into the urban institutional arrangements (in terms of specific forums for delivering the rights). The roadmap to liveable cities has four quadrants- equity and adequate infrastructure for all, resource efficiency and sustainability, urban form for quality life and institutions for technological change and innovation. On equity measures the issue of rights for migrants is emphasised: "…To reduce the destabilizing impacts of economic disparities, cities need to move from social polarization to social integration. In particular, the unjust treatment of migrant workers should end, starting with their full integration in the social security system, equal rights to education for their children, and laws and regulations to protect their rights and interests." (UNDP, 2013: 84).

C. *Housing inequalities*: Frediani applies the capability approach to several aspects of urban inequalities especially related to housing and squatter settlements in Brazil. Frediani (2007) compares Sen's capability approach and the multi-dimensional nature of well-being with the World Bank's emphasis on income based measures of poverty. Frediani also notes that the language of freedom has already been used by John Turner (1972) with regard to housing as a verb and

the freedom of people to build. Housing is certainly an important dimension that affects many other well-being as well as agency freedoms. In the work on slums of Mumbai, it is seen that within a given geographic location, there can be significant differences in access to many basic services depending on whether slum is notified (meaning officially recognised) or non-notified (Subbaraman et al, 2012) and that living in a non-notified slum is associated with significantly increased mental health issues (Subbaraman et al, 2014).

D. *Right to the city and capabilities*: Deneulin (2014) starts with a discussion of the 'right to the city' approach proposed by French philosopher Henri Lefebvre based on Marx's distinction between exchange and use values. While the exchange values dominate, Lefebvre attempts to regain the use value of public spaces and activities using the idea that every citizen – rich or poor- should have the right to the city and be able to participate in its functioning as an equal member. Deneulin goes on to note that after an endorsement of the right to the city by international institutions, the right to the city has been used as a synonym for inclusive cities. For Deneulin the capability approach has four contributions to the right to the city:

> "…First, it provides tools for wellbeing evaluation, which the right to the city does not. Second, it makes an analysis of inter-linkages between different rights possible. Third, it emphasizes the role of institutions and can bring a structural evaluation of wellbeing to match the collective dimension of the right to the city. Fourth, its agency aspect opens up to democratic pluralism within the utopian dimension of the right to the city." (Deneulin, 2004:7).

Deneulin goes on to combine the rights based discourses and Susan Fainstain's book title 'The Just City' to frame 'just cities for life' as a way to apply the capability approach.

In my view, right to the city is primarily a philosophical concept to understand the complexification of the city and the myths and illusions associated with the utopia of urban society. The word right can be misconstrued given the last two decades of 'rights based approaches to development' which focus on individual centred rights whereas right to the city is a kind of collective and aggregate right (Harvey,2012). Right to the city is a framework to analyse power relations and anticipate and explain why some people win and others lose in the urban phenomenon (unlike in economic models). Holston and Appadurai (1996:188) remind us that: "Although one of the essential projects of nation-building has been to dismantle the historic primacy of urban citizenship and to replace it with the national, cities remain the strategic arena for the development of citizenship." For Appadurai (2002), globalisation is producing new forms of governance relationships (in his words 'governmentalities') where within a city there could be completely different spheres one interconnected with global economy (thus producing enormous opportunities for concentration of wealth) and the other that

is not connected with this hyper-marketised system of flows and hence offering little by way of opportunities to escape grinding poverty. For Appadurai, the 40 per cent or so of people in Mumbai living in less than 8 per cent of land in slums and on pavements are 'citizens without a city'.

Let me now summarise some issues from this literature review. My motivation in wanting to use the capability approach to cities and the urban questions are similar to these authors. We can identify below several ways in which the capability approach can help us frame the urban question and find ways to resolve some of the many dilemmas.

(i) Cities in their role as economic engines tend to prioritise and give prominence to economic productivity and thus mainly those who generate economic benefits through industry, services and working. The capability approach encourages us to focus on an expansive view of enhancing substantive freedoms for every single person including children, women, the elderly, the disabled persons, those requiring care and assistance, students, artisans and artists and many other citizens. A challenge for researchers and those applying the capability approach is to demonstrate ways in which the priorities of those currently marginalised or ignored can be centred and emphasised in deliberative public policy.

(ii) In thinking about cities, the capability approach requires us to confront inequality and injustices in every dimension of inter-personal relations including those governed by cultural norms including the norms of reciprocity (in space and time), formal and informal contracts. Here, the capability approach requires us to shine light on injustices that can co-exist with cultural acceptability.

(iii) The capability approach warns against prioritisation of certain aspects of freedoms and especially the tendency to prioritise more readily visible infrastructure investments that deliver in relation to well-being freedoms while relegating the more complex and less visible agency freedoms. The challenge here is to explore and develop ways in which conflicts between different types or classes of freedoms should be dealt with.

(iv) Using the capability approach we can reframe the relationship between institutions of governance and the citizens where active participation of citizens in all aspects of policy making and implementation should be pursued not merely because it is fashionable or becomes easier due to digital technologies and social media but because the citizens have the right to participate in public reasoning and deliberation.

(v) The capability approach also encourages us to use the informational space for evaluations carefully and to think of pluralistic and multiple dimensions. It is possible to develop indicators for inclusive and sustainable cities focusing on social (gender, youth and ageing, sexual, racial and religious freedoms), economic (employment, financial, and enterprise aspects), environmental (housing, quality of life, water and

environmental footprint, carbon neutrality) and agency (political participation, institutions and resilience) dimensions. At present a few such indexes exist. According to an annual index published by The Economist the 'most liveable cities' include Melbourne, Vienna and Vancouver at the top and Damascus, Tripoli, Lagos and Dhaka at the bottom. Top ranked cities tend to be in rich countries, have thriving local government and civil society networks whereas the bottom ranked cities tend to be in post-conflict developing countries where insecurity and conflict may have eroded trust in public institutions. However, such indexes reproduce a wealth ranking of societies and ignore the potential for inclusion and sustainability. An attempt by UN-HABITAT focuses on the so called 'city prosperity index (CPI). According to the HABITAT, urban prosperity comprises: "…productivity; infrastructure; quality of life; equity and inclusion; environmental sustainability, and governance and legislation." The UN-HABITAT website mentions that the CPI framework is 'based on fundamental principle of human rights'. Presently data has been compiled for some 300 cities worldwide (UN-HABITAT, 2015). Another index worthy of mention is the index of social progress for cities of Colombia (Progreso Social Colombia, 2015; Alidadi et al, 2015). This index combines three dimensions: basic human needs (nutrition, water, sanitation, shelter, and personal safety), foundations of well-being (access to basic knowledge, access to information and communication, health and wellness and ecosystem sustainability) and opportunity (personal rights, personal freedom and choice, tolerance and inclusion and access to advanced education).Compilation of index for ten cities suggested that Manizales and Bucaramanga are at the top while Cali, Cartagena and Valledupar are at the bottom.

While such indexes are constructed with a view to comparison of cities, in my view it is important to develop indicators of evaluation which are city-specific (and hence may not necessarily be relevant to other cities) and inform public reasoning and deliberations. City-level human development reports such as the Delhi report (AF and IHD, 2013) help to raise discussion and debate on a number of issues relevant to realising freedoms at the city level.


## 3. Cities and urban issues through the lens of the capability approach: an exploration

*(1) Cities and living longer*

Among the most basic of freedoms is the freedom to live a long and healthy life with dignity. The capability approach to cities would encourage us to ask the questions such as: do cities help the citizens to live longer, healthier and lead a life of dignity. Evidence for each of those questions is rather mixed. In principle cities and towns should offer better prospects for health with better infrastructure and access to health care. However, as the UCL Lancet Commission (2012:1) noted: "...the so called

urban advantage...has to be actively created and maintained through policy interventions".  If people are living longer is it everyone in the city or only those who can afford it? So does this mean that cities while raising the overall life expectancy actually hide the significant inequalities in life expectancy?

Data on life expectancy at the level of cities is not available for many cities in the developing countries and emerging economies. National level data is really not appropriate to answer this question. However, just to see if we can find any relationship between the level of urbanisation measured in terms of proportion of population living in urban areas and life expectancy in general, I have used data from the World Development Indicators.

**Change in life expectancy 1961-2011**



y = 0.1671x + 12.376
R² = 0.1009

• Change in life expectancy 1961-2011

—— Linear (Change in life expectancy 1961-2011)

*Change in life expectancy 1961-2011* (y-axis)

**Change in urban population share in national population 1961-2011** (x-axis)
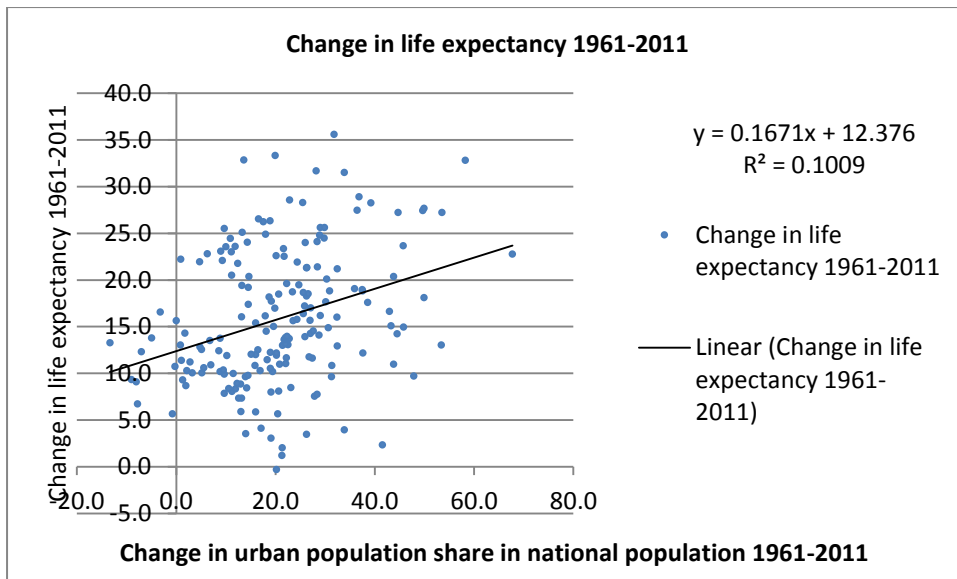
Figure 1a: Urbanisation and living longer?

Source: Compiled by author using data from the World Development Indicators

**Cities and long life**



y = 0.2317x + 57.817
R² = 0.4052

**Life expectancy at birth in years 2014** (y-axis)

**Urban piopulation (% of total population) 2014** (x-axis)
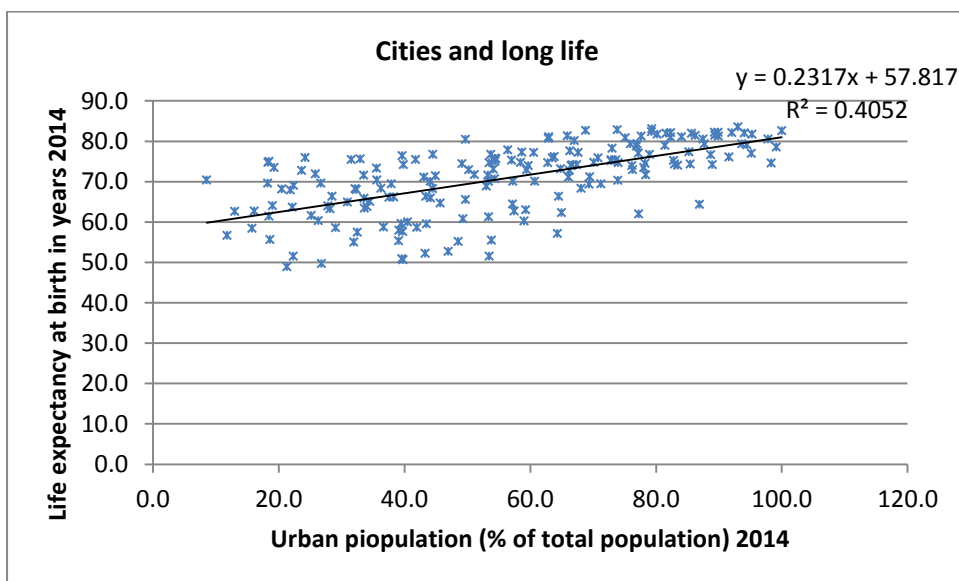
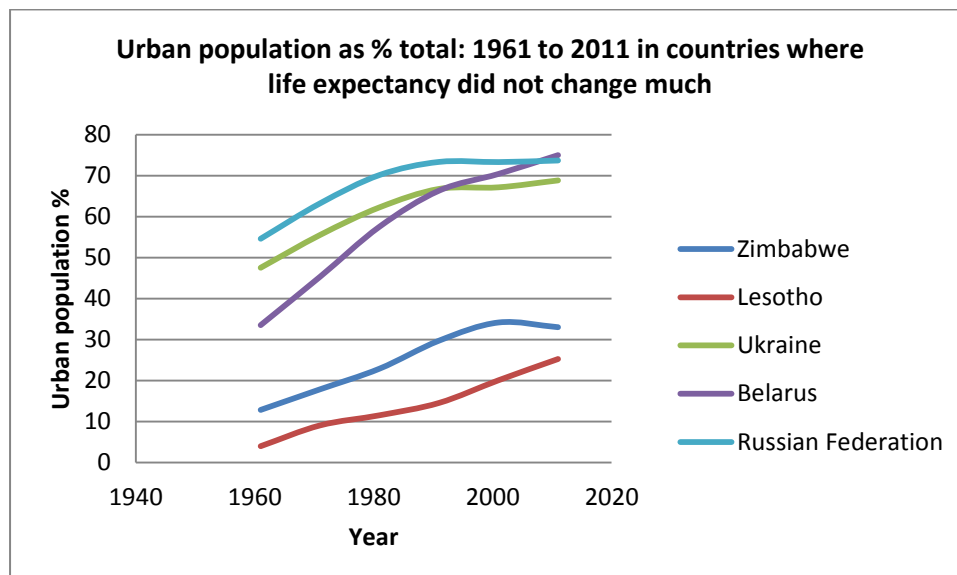Figure 1b: Urbanisation and living longer?

Source: Compiled by author using data from the World Development Indicators

From figure 1–a, we can see that urbanisation does not automatically lead to increased life expectancy. There are many countries at the bottom of that scatter diagram where urban population share has increased significantly between 1961 and 2011 with hardly any improvement in life expectancy at all. (Ideally, we should be

looking at data over one hundred years or so but we do not have cross-country data earlier than 1961.)

This is a complex relationship so we should be very careful in interpreting or drawing any conclusions from this but at a first glance from figure 1-b there appears to be correlation between level of urbanisation and living longer. However, this can be simply an association and there may be no causality and also both urbanisation and living longer can be endogenously related to other aspects of structural change and development processes that the relationship could be spurious.

In some countries between 1961 and 2011, life expectancy hardly changed at all even when urban population considerably increased (notwithstanding the profound advances in technology and medicine). These countries include Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russian Federation. In the case of Southern African countries we know that life expectancy plummeted during the 1980s due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The case of former Soviet Union countries is complex and there could be issues related to data quality even when retrospective estimates were made.



Figure 2-a: Urbanisation but not living longer?

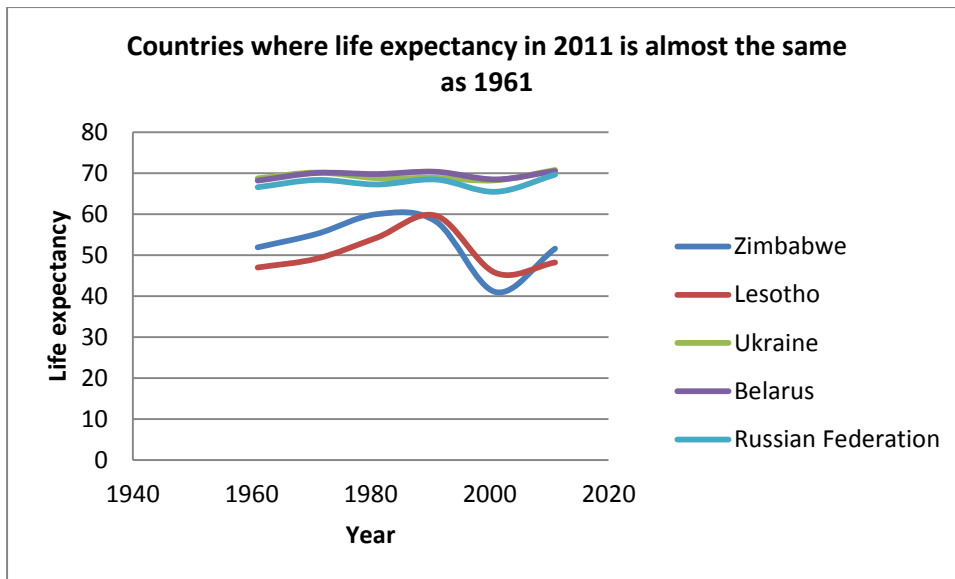Source: Compiled by author using data from the World Development Indicators

**Figure 2-b: Urbanisation but not living longer?**

Source: Compiled by author using data from the World Development Indicators

On the other hand there are also cases where urbanisation seems to have delivered enormous gains in life expectancy of more than 30 years in the case of countries such as Oman, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Timor-Leste. We do not fully know what is behind this but we can surmise that in these countries urbanisation must have taken place alongside significant improvements to public health measures.

*The social gradient and social determinants of health and mortality*

These national level analyses do not capture (a) any significant differences in sub-national regions such as provinces or states (due to differences in quality of governance for example); (b) significant differences that can exist between large cities which tend to have better infrastructure and health facilities and smaller towns and urban settlements which may have been classified as urban but do not have the economies of scale and scope of a large city; and (b) significant differences that can exist within a city between the wealthier neighbourhoods and the poorer neighbourhoods. In the cities of Great Britain, the concept of social gradient has been observed whereby within a given city, life expectancy can depend on where you live. In England the difference in life expectancy between most deprived and least deprived areas can be up to seven years and for men in Scotland it could be as high as eleven years. My attempt to examine this in Bradford using mortality (deaths from all causes per 1000 population) shows that mortality in less affluent wards of inner city (such as Manningham and Tong wards) are almost double that of the mortality rates in the affluent suburbs of Bradford such as Ilkley, Baildon, Wharfedale and rural parts of Bingley.
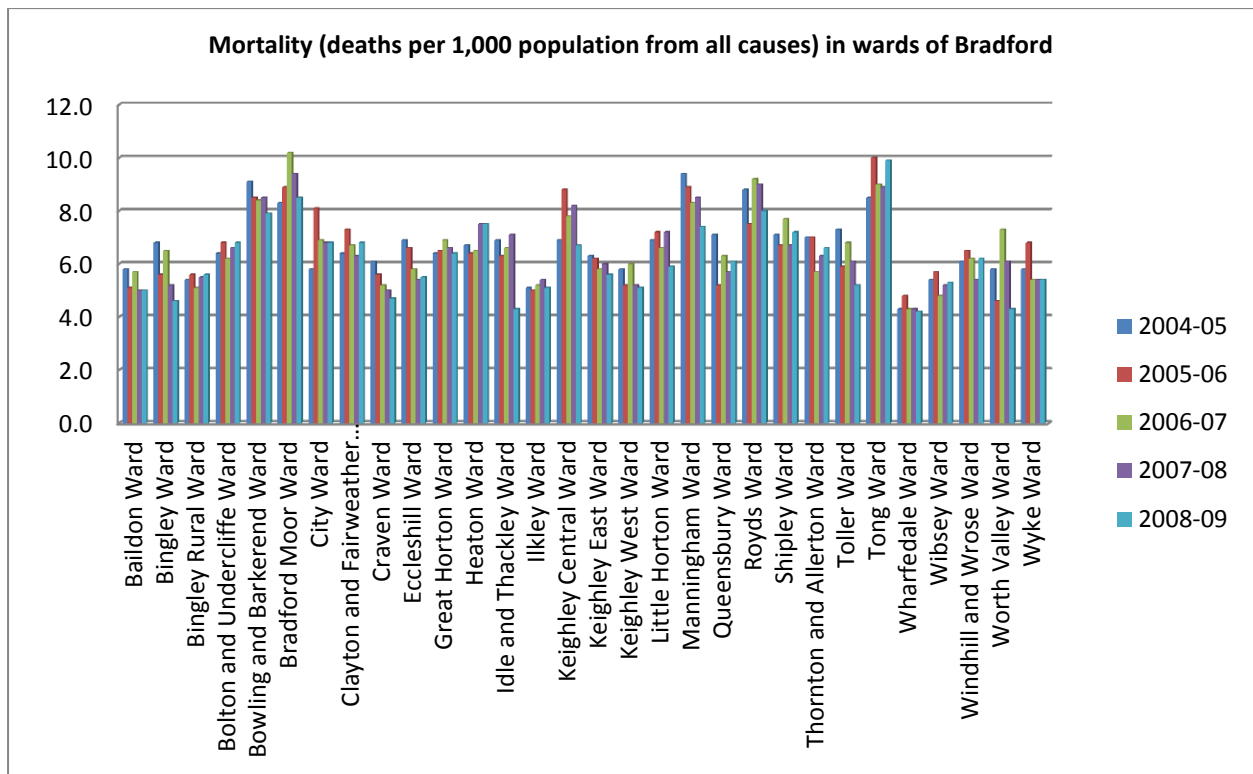
Figure 3: Social gradient in Bradford's mortality rates?

Source: Compiled by author using data from the West Yorkshire Observatory

Poor people tend to have poor diet and lack of opportunities to lead healthy living including in terms of access to clean water and sanitation, access to basic health care and health and nutrition related information, vaccination programmes and sport and recreational facilities and all of these can have a cumulative effect on life expectancy.

However, there is also the so called 'Glasgow effect' where individual socio-economic characteristics do not explain lower life expectancy of the city's male population as a whole as compared with other Scottish cities (Hanlon et al, 2005; DoH, 2010). Gray (2007) noted:

> "Elevated rates of acute sickness and potential psychiatric morbidity in men in West Central Scotland, Greater Glasgow, and Glasgow City compared with the rest of Scotland are not explained by socio-economic circumstances. In addition, the higher rates of long standing illness in West Central Scotland remain after adjustment for socio-economic factors."

Since the freedom to live a long and healthy life is an important dimension of freedoms, there is an urgency to focus on these huge differences which are manifestations of institutionalised injustices. As the Marmot Review noted, health inequalities are manifestation of underlying inequalities and unfairness in the society:

> "Inequalities in health arise because of inequalities in society – in the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. So close is the link between particular social and economic features of society and the distribution of health among the population, that the magnitude of health inequalities is a good marker of progress towards creating a fairer society. Taking action to reduce inequalities in health does not require a separate health agenda, but action across the whole of society." (Marmot Review, DoH, 2010).

We have a long way to go in understanding and analysing health inequalities in the developing countries. Life expectancy data is not available even at city level for many cities let alone at neighbourhood or sub-city spatial unit level to be able to examine if a similar social gradient exists in cities in Asia and Africa too. Social gradient may be a product of spatial segregation of poverty and vulnerability. Interesting work is being done on slums and health by Ramnath and Deshmukh and we shall briefly discuss this in a subsequent paragraph in this section.

*(2) Cities and social and economic inequalities:*

Cities are engines of economic development and their economic productivity dimension receives prominence in justification for 'urban bias'. However, less recognised are the facts that cities are also social dynamos in many cases leading to and challenging existing social norms and creating new opportunities. While embedded social hierarchies and stereotypes continue to get reinforced in urban living, cities can also be empowering in some cases and the scale offered by cities enables collective action possible for individuals belonging to certain vulnerable groups to come together as a group and champion their rights through social movements. As Holston and Appadurai (1996:198) noted: "…as the social movements of the urban poor create unprecedented claims on and to the city, they expand citizenship to new social bases. In so doing, they create new sources of citizenship rights and corresponding forms of self-rule."

Theoretically, if urbanisation promotes equality or is a manifestation of pro-poor development, as urbanisation takes place we will expect poverty (in all its dimensions) to decrease significantly. However, from our analysis we find that there appear to be several alternative trajectories. We can examine a few countries as cases. This data is based on poverty head count and the limitations of such an approach to measuring poverty are well-known. Income based poverty approaches miss many dimensions of deprivation and thus tend to under-estimate the true extent of capability deprivation. If for a moment we suspend judgement and see income poverty as one of the various dimensions of ill-being, then we can see that urbanisation is far from pro-poor in many cases.

Case 1- Guinea and Honduras – where urban population increased slightly but urban poverty increased faster. This means much of urban population growth is taking place due to migration of poor people to the cities (without the expected growth in income after migration) or that urban growth is resulting in more people in the cities becoming poor.
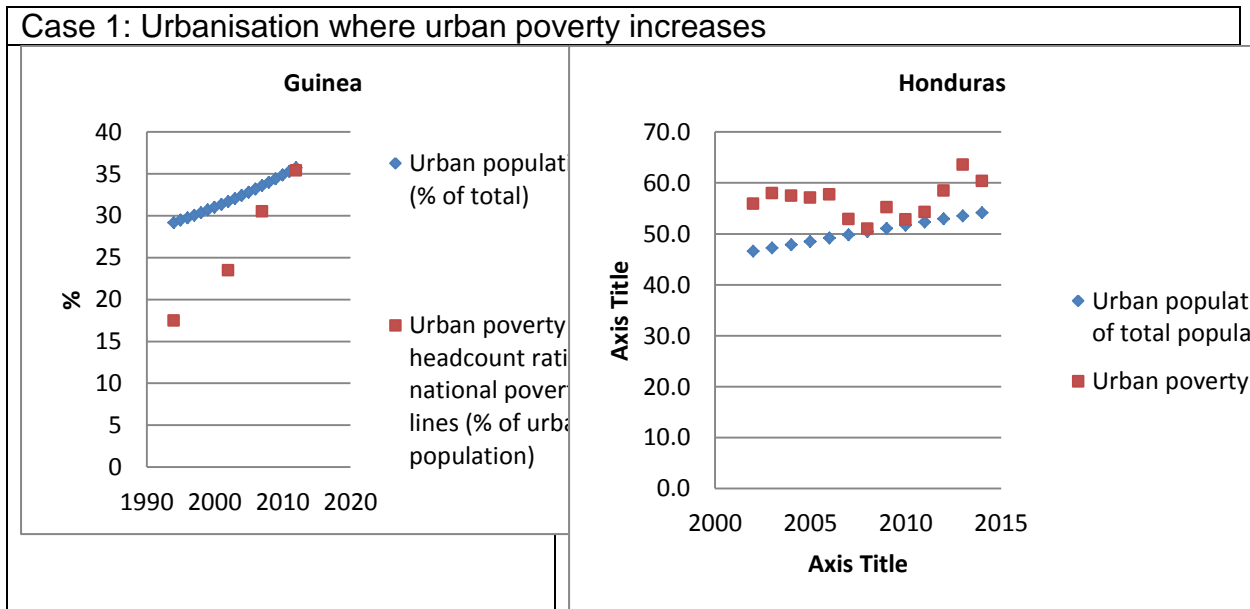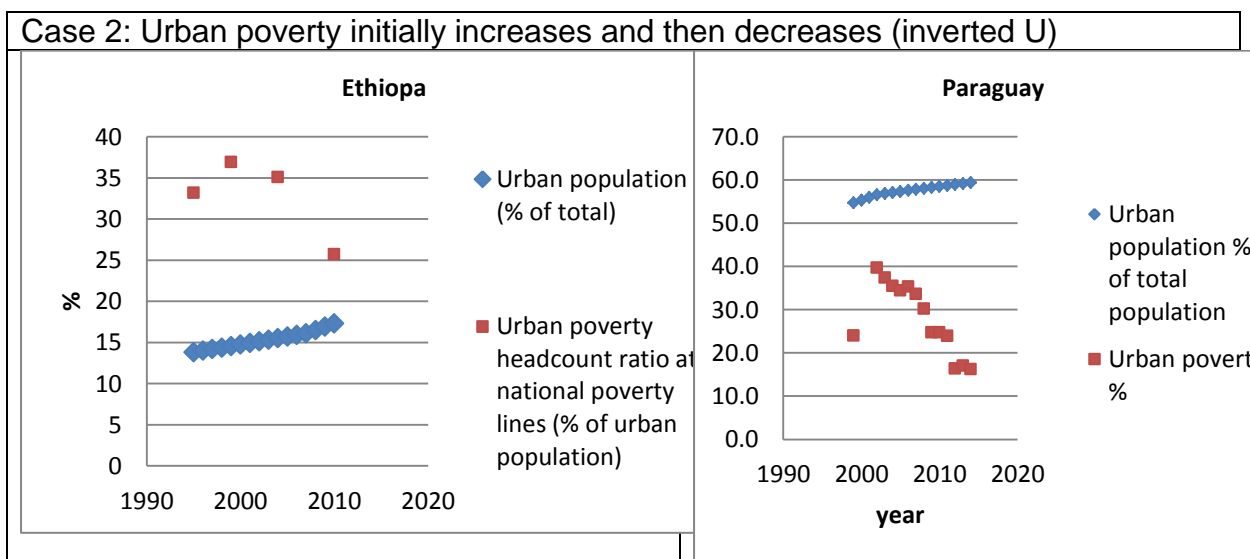


Figure 3-a: Urbanisation and urban poverty

Source: Compiled by author using data from the World Development Indicators

Case 2: This includes countries where initially urban poverty increases and then it begins to decrease (a kind of inverted U curve). Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Paraguay and Uruguay are good examples of this.



Figure 3-b: Urbanisation and urban poverty

Case 3: With urbanisation poverty decreases steadily and significantly. We can see this in Ecuador, Malawi, Thailand and Kazakhstan.
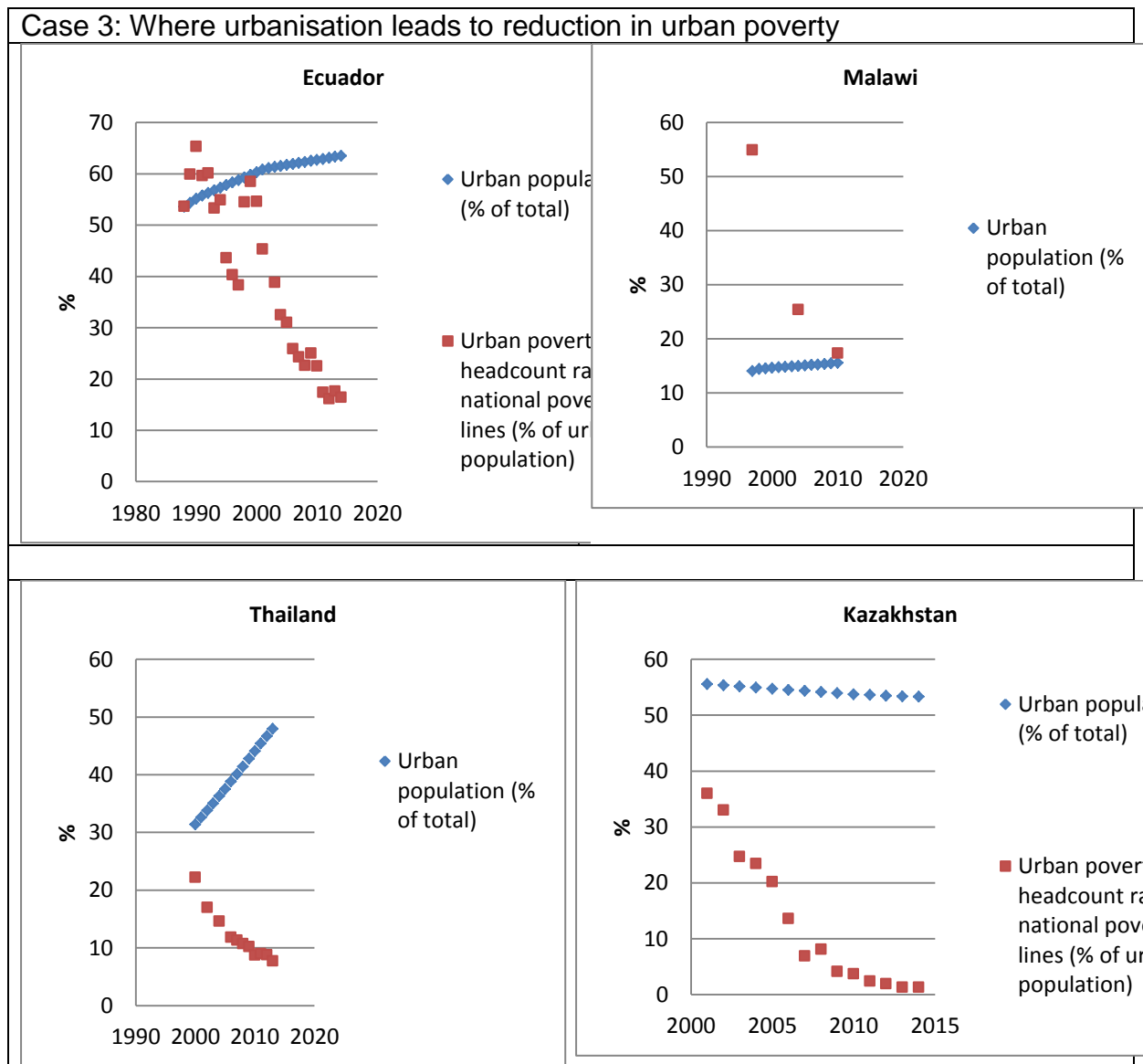
Case 3: Where urbanisation leads to reduction in urban poverty



Figure 3-c: Urbanisation and urban poverty

These cases suggest that urbanisation and the associated economic growth do not automatically result in pro-poor development unless specific policies are taken to make it so. Here, the capability approach can be very useful in challenging urban policies for their impact on poverty and deprivation.

*(3) Cities as disempowering machines*

Cities can be empowering but they can also be systemically disempowering. This is particularly true in the case of four special groups, namely: women in general, children, the elderly people, and the disabled. In each case, cities can systemically disempower each group in different ways and create additional vulnerabilities as the size of the city increases.

Take for example, the simple case of public spaces for the elderly people to be able to walk alone or together with others or to gather to exercise or simply for a conversation. As cities grow, space attracts premium and commons such as open or green spaces, parks and pavements become appropriated for private gains, be encroached upon or barriers erected for the exclusive use of the 'powerful'. Pavements become economic spaces rather than social spaces forcing people to walk on the road and thus risking coming in proximity with moving vehicles. Appropriation of pavements by both organised and unorganised sector economic activities makes walking in cities a very unpleasant and tedious experience. In many cities, pedestrians do not have any rights and in the planning of infrastructure such as intersections, road furniture and alignment, they are completely ignored or if at all come at the bottom of the chain. Recently, in a qualitative study of road traffic intersections in Chennai, I noticed that many traffic lights did not include lights for pedestrians or even designated crossings. As a result, pedestrians have to wait until enough number of people have gathered and use collective action to slowly move through traffic and vehicles indicating them to slow down. This is a simple manifestation of a complete denial of the rights of pedestrians and the ability of planning systems to think of the needs of pedestrians and create the necessary safe public spaces and infrastructure for this purpose. It is not a surprise that India has the world's largest number of road traffic deaths (some of which may be due to avoidable pedestrian-vehicle collisions). However, we should note that it is not a simple case of resolving the rights of the pedestrians.

The issue is very complex as the right to walk safely clashes with the right to livelihood of many people who depend on unorganised sector jobs. Clearing the pavement of unorganised sector may solve one problem but it may make several people dependent on those livelihoods to go hungry or lose their economic security entirely. What is 'safe' for some may make others 'unsafe' and 'insecure'. This highlights the challenge of defining freedoms, valuing the different freedoms and freedoms of all people.

*(4) Smart cities- rhetoric versus freedoms*

There is much talk about smart cities. Various definitions exist but a smart city is considered to be one that uses information and communication technologies to use infrastructure to meet the needs of citizens in timely and efficient manner. While adjectives to describe cities galore, following Hollands (2008), it is perhaps time to ask the real smart, inclusive and sustainable city to 'please stand up'. While discussion on 'smart' cities tends to focus mainly (and for some critics excessively) on digital technologies and information infrastructure, from a capability perspective the real 'smart' cities are those that enhance agency and autonomy of citizens and empower them to lead a healthy and sustainable life and active citizenship. However, the vision of smart citizenship based on big data and open data approaches does not fully reflect the emphasis on freedoms central to the capability approach. Discussions as in the case of Masdar city in Abudhabi, Songdo in the Republic of Korea and the initial phase of 100 Smart Cities Mission in India can lead to the criticism that these are symptomatic of 'technological determinism' of urban behaviour- which seems to be based on the view that providing the infrastructure and digital technologies will lead to sustainable behaviours. Though the underlying models informing these discussions use the so called 'agent based modelling' approach, their use of the word agency is limited than the way it is used in the context of the capability approach. As Batty (2013:79) noted, agents in smart cities discourse can include: "…locations, activity types, individuals, or aggregates of populations, all of which have some distinct purpose". Smartness is usually attributed to the algorithms and the ability of the machines to learn from data and predict human behaviour. It appears that smart cities are ignoring the fact that for millennia real smart cities were those that started by thinking about the citizen first (rather than smartness of technology) and they then developed a better understanding of how both hard and 'soft' infrastructure networks are governed, how individual citizens can shape and influence collective action and how institutions adapt and foster innovative approaches to governance that are by design inclusive, smart and sustainable (Anand, 2017).

*(5). Cities and women- Rapes, violence, gendered nature of urban living, the concept of safety and security.*

While one aspect of cities is that they can bring out the best of creativity and innovation in human mind, they also seem to bring out the basest, meanest and most brutal and bestial parts of human behaviour. It is true that in the digital age, innovation can take place almost anywhere, the agglomeration economies and network externalities offered by cities provide some advantages to the development of an ecosystem of innovation. However, cities also appear to give focus to violence especially based on identities such as gender, caste, religion or political affiliation. There is spurious correlation if we were to look for a relationship between the level of urbanisation and the level of violence captured by crime rate but some of this appears to be due to the reporting effect. However, notwithstanding the scope for error in generalising about the level of violence in cities, cities appear to have the ability to degenerate to the lowest levels of human morality in the nature of violence against women, trafficking of women and children and their ability to commodify

almost everything. Violence against women and rapes as often reported from Indian cities such as Delhi in 2013 or Bengaluru in 2017 challenge the very concepts of human decency and naïve views about cities as crucibles of civilisation. In some perspectives, cities seem to be very good at commodification of nature (Bridge and Watson, 2000; Heynan et al, 2006) and this seems to extend to commodification of the human body as well whereby rapes (and trafficking as well as trade in human organs) are occasional manifestations of much deeper structural faults which if not cemented through efforts that nurture moral foundations and critical perspectives of self and society can hide and cover over brutality. However, economic incentives and profiteering opportunity through land and real estate appear to be more likely in the case of orchestrated group-based violence such as riots and violence against particular communities.

Notwithstanding the claim of cities about their contribution to social progress, we find no change whatsoever in the proportion of women in non-wage employment when we compare the data for the years 2000 and 2010 in figures 4-a and 4-b (where the horizontal axis shows proportion of population in urban areas and the vertical axis shows proportion of women among non-agricultural wage employment).
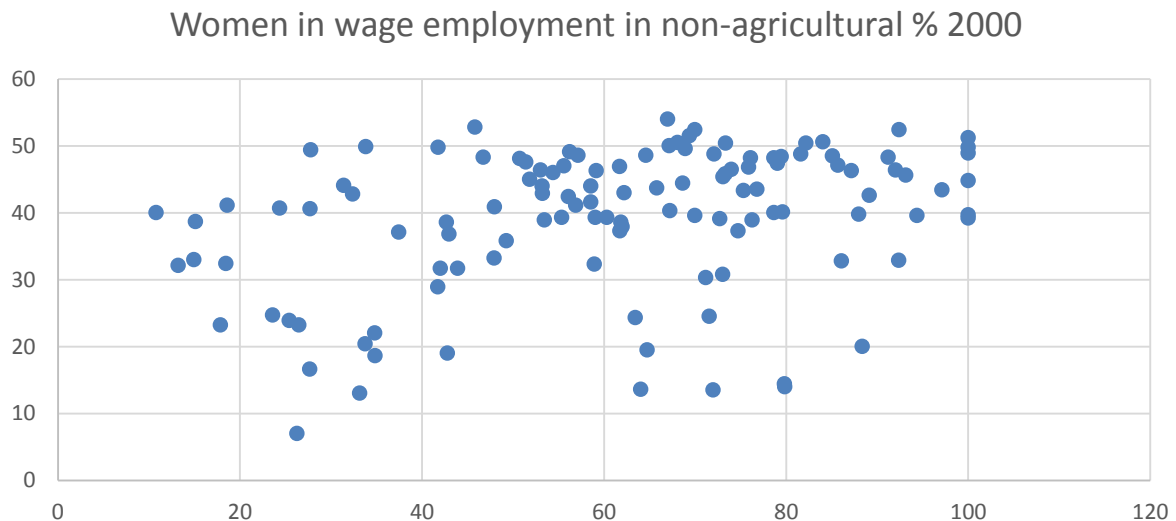


Women in wage employment in non-agricultural % 2000

Figure 4-a: Urbanisation and gender inequality in wage employment 2000

Source: Compiled by author using data from the World Development Indicators
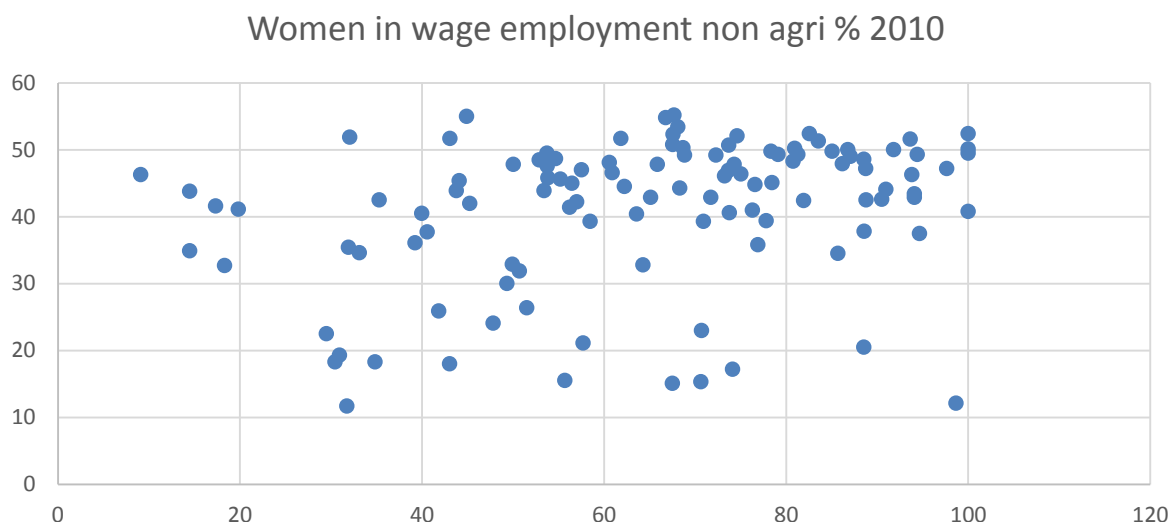
Women in wage employment non agri % 2010

Figure 4-b: Urbanisation and gender inequality in wage employment 2010

Source: Compiled by author using data from the World Development Indicators

This suggests that even though cities and urban areas have slowly (and reluctantly) opened up employment opportunities to both men and women, progress towards equality is indeed very slow. The capability approach would encourage us to challenge deep seated barriers to equality.

*(6) Cities and housing: Slums and Peri-urban living.*

Another intractable issue that a researcher of the capability approach needs to resolve is about those living in slums and peri-urban locations with limited infrastructure. As already mentioned some 880 million people representing approximately a fifth of all urban residents live in slums. In many countries, there are numerous barriers to access to services such as clean water, sanitation and electricity for people living in slums. Where such services do exist, the quality is often poor, the cost per unit is often much higher than what non-slum households pay and the households living in slums appear to have limited legal recognition and ability to participate in institutions governing urban areas. In general, the more urbanised a country, the proportion of urban residents in slums appears to decrease. This negative correlation (figure 5) is easy to reason- as the  country becomes more urbanised, the ability of urban residents to influence policy and get access to public services may improve. This may result in reforms to housing and land development and providing adequate funding to address the issues of slum residents and provide them with decent housing. However, the dispersed nature of the scatter diagram suggests there are huge variations. This suggests that urbanisation is not automatically pro-poor unless specific social and distributive policies are pursued.
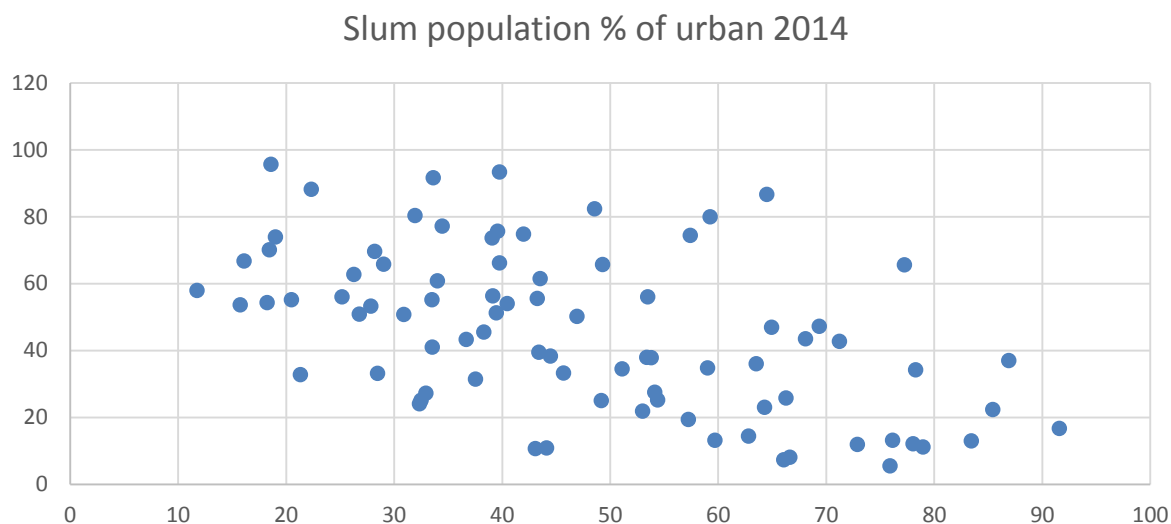
## Slum population % of urban 2014



Figure 5: Urbanisation and proportion of people living in slums 2014

Source: Compiled by author using data from the World Development Indicators

There is some interesting work being done by PUKAR researchers on health impacts of living in slums. Subbaraman et al (2012) noted significant differences in health indicators between the 'notified slums' (meaning legally recognised) and the non-notified slums. This further highlights the importance of legal recognition and the impact it can have in the ability of residents to various services which in turn affect their health indicators including life expectancy and infant mortality.

## 4. Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to take an overview of applying the capability approach to cities and urban development issues. The literature review suggested that while there are various islands of exploration, there is much to be done in applying the capability approach to cities and urban issues. The exploration in section 3 included a discussion on some of the freedoms and also the nature of conflicts between different freedoms and freedoms of different citizens or groups of individuals and how we may be able to use data to examine evidence on some initial conjectures.

Cities do not necessarily and automatically lead to their citizens living a long and healthy life. As our analysis indicated the relationship is complex. In some cases, urbanisation does not seem to have any impact on life expectancy at all whereas in other cases urbanisation coincided with significant increases in life expectancy. The positive gains of urbanisation in terms of access to education and health infrastructure, better access to information, reduced time to respond to health emergencies and seek medical assistance etc., can be nullified or cancelled by the

negative impacts of pollution and urban living on physical and mental health, the lack of opportunities for social interaction and access to urban public spaces by the elderly and the lack of access to water and sanitation by a significant section of urban households living in the slums.

A large city is not merely a scaled up version of a smaller urban settlement. The small town can be as complex and unfathomable as a large city but there could be additional dimensions of complexity that are more readily visible in the case of larger cities. On the one hand, the scale should offer better possibilities for collective action by minorities, and various vulnerable groups and thus enable them to better organise themselves and articulate their demands for rights. However, the cases of women and slum dwellers seem to suggest that such collective action does not seem to happen that easily. On the other hand, cities also seem to facilitate collective action by mafia, those who want to sell or consume drugs or various commodities including commodified women and children. Thus the same logic of collective action enables groups of predatory interests to come together and take advantage of proximity.

The issue of pavements and the lack of rights for pedestrians for safe spaces to walk versus the economic livelihood opportunities for the urban informal sector workers bring to the fore the complexity of resolving conflicts between the freedoms of different individuals or different groups of individuals.

It is hoped that the explorations in this chapter highlight the enormous possibilities for applying the capability approach to cities to examine various manifestations of urban inequalities and the potential to make a difference to the lives of many whose rights and claims are currently denied in the 'smart city' and other popular rhetorics.


## Acknowledgements

# REFERENCES

Academic Foundation (AF) and Institute for Human Development (IHD) (2013) *Delhi human development report 2013: Improving lives, promoting inclusion*, Delhi: IHD.

Alidadi F., et al (2015) The social inclusion index, Americas Quarterly, volume 9, number 3.

Anand PB and Perman R (1999) Preferences, inequity and entitlements: Some Issues from a CVM Study of Water Supply in Madras, India, *Journal of International Development*, 11,1, 27-46.

Anand PB (2001) Water 'scarcity' in Chennai, India: Institutions, entitlements and aspects of inequality in access, UNU-WIDER Discussion paper 140/2001, Helsinki: UNU-WIDER.

Anand PB (2007) *Scarcity, entitlements and the economics of water in developing countries,* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Anand PB (2017) Smart cities and stupid people? The real challenges of smart, inclusive and sustainable cities (forthcoming).

Appadurai A (2002) Deep democracy: urban governmentality and the horizon of politics, *Environment and Urbanisation*, 13,2,23-44.

Batty M (2013) *The new science of cities*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

Bettencourt L., et al (2007) Growth, innovation, scaling and the pace of life in cities, PNAS, 104, 17,7301-6.

Bouteligier S (2013) Cities, networks and global environmental governance: spaces of innovation, places of leadership, New York: Routledge.

Bridge G and Watson S (ed) (2000) *A companion to the city*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Caballero M (2004) Academic turns city into a social experiment: Mayor Mockus of Bogota and his spectacularly applied theory, Harvard Gazette, March 11, 20104.

Deneulin S. (2014) *Creating more just cities: the right to the city and the capability approach combined,* Bath Papers in International Development and Well-being Working paper 32, University of Bath.

Department of Health (2010) *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: The Michael Marmot Review*.

The Economist (2015) The world's most liveable cities, GRAPHIC DETAIL, August 18, 2015.

Frediani A.A. (2007) Amartya Sen, the World Bank, and the redress of urban poverty: A Brazilian case study, *Journal of Human Development*, 8,1,133-152.

Glaeser E (2011) *Triumph of the city: how urban spaces make us human*, London: Pan Books.

Goldsmith S. and Crawford S. (2014) *The responsive city: engaging communities through data-smart governance*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Wiley.

Goldstein B and Dyson L (ed) (2013) *Beyond transparency: Open data and the future of civic innovation,* San Francisco: Code for America.

Gray L (2007) Comparisons of health related behaviours and health measures between Glasgow and the Rest of Scotland, Briefing Paper 7, Glasgow Centre for Population Health.

Gurrero R and Concha Eastman A (nd) An epidemiological approach for the prevention of urban violence: the case of Cali, Colombia.

Hanlon P, Lawder R, Buchanan D, Redpath A, Walsh D, Wood R. et al. (2005) Why is mortality higher in Scotland than in England and Wales? Decreasing influence of socio-economic deprivation between 1981 and 2001 supports the existence of a 'Scottish Effect', Journal of Public Health, 27, 2:199-204.

Heynan N Kalka M and Swyngedou E (ed) (2006) *In the nature of cities: Urban political ecology and the politics of urban metabolism*, London: Routledge.

Hollands R (2008) Will the real smart city please stand up? Intelligent, progressive or entrepreneurial? *City-Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, 12,3, 303-320.

Holston J and Appadurai A (1996) Cities and citizenship, *Public Culture*, 8:187-204.

International Labour Organisation (2013) *Measuring informality: a statistical manual on the informal sector and informal employment*, Geneva: ILO.

McLaren D and Agyeman J (2015) *Sharing cities: a case for truly smart and sustainable cities,* Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Narayan U and Bell  (2005) Who changed Delhi's air? The roles of the court and the executive in environmental policymaking, RFF Discussion paper5-48, Washington DC: Resources for the Future.

Rydin Y et al (2012) *Shaping cities for health: complexity and the planning of urban environments in the twenty-first century*, The Lancet Commissions-UCL..

Samuels J (ed) (2005) *Removing unfreedoms: citizens as agents of change in urban development,* Rugby: ITDG.

Sen A (1979) Equality of what? Tanner Lecture on Human Values, Stanford University.

Sen A (1985) Well-being, agency and freedom, The Dewey Lectures, Journal of Philosophy, 82.

Sen A (1992) *Inequality re-examined*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Sen A (1999) *Development as freedom*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Sen A (2009) *The idea of justice*, London: Allen Lane.

Subbaraman R. et al (2012) Off the map: the health and social implications of being a non-notified slum in India*, Environment and Urbanisation*, 24,2 643-663.

Patel S and Mitlin D (2001) The work of SPARC, the National Slum Dwellers Federation and Mahila Milan, IIED Working paper 5, London: IIED.

Progreso Social Colombia (2015) *Social progress index for cities of Colombia*.

Townsend A. 2014) *Smart cities: big data, civic hackers and the quest for new utopia*, New Yoprk: W.W. Norton and Co.

UNDP (2013) *China National Human Development Report 2013: Sustainable and Liveable Cities: Toward Ecological Civilization*, Beijing: UNDP.

UN-HABITAT (2015) *The Global Cities Report 2015*, UN-HABITAT, Nairobi.

UN-HABITAT (2016) *World Cities Report 2016: Urbanisation and development: Emerging futures*, Nairobi: UN-HABITAT.

[8641 words]