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Creating Safe and Inclusive Cities that Leave No One Behind

Half of humanity now lives in urban areas, and a growing number of cities are leading the way in generating global GDP. However, cities have increasingly become key loci of violence over the last 50 years, which particularly affects the most marginalised. Creating safe cities which adhere to the principles of the New Urban Agenda will require fostering urban safety through inclusive policies and practices that secure, but do not securitise, urban spaces. This involves using innovative measures to accurately understand people's vulnerabilities, supporting evidence-gathering from small and medium-sized towns alongside larger cities, and analysing safe and resilient urban spaces alongside more fragile ones.

While a growing number of cities are leading the way in generating global GDP, a vast number of urban areas, both large and small, continue to be left behind. Of the world's 31 most fragile and conflict-affected countries, 23 are projected to be significantly urban in the near future. At the same time, fatalities due to armed violence in non-war settings far outweigh war-related deaths, and much of this violence is located in cities. And while homicide is often cited as a cause of death and victimisation in non-conflict settings, it is not an adequate indicator to describe the many other socio-political sources of insecurity and violence that are taking a grip on urban centres across the world.

The various dimensions of urban safety and inclusivity across fragile, non-conflict and post-disaster contexts can be systematised into three distinct levels:

- At the *street level*, an important starting point is how safety and inclusivity relate to the lived experiences of city dwellers, particularly the poorest and most marginalised.
- At the *city level*, safety and inclusivity relate to city-wide socio-political and civic actors and institutions that govern urban security and basic service provision.
- At the *national level* the dynamics of security provision in cities relate to the processes of state-building and peacebuilding.

The politics and contestation that are a part and parcel of urban living can be managed peacefully through a range of policies, programmes or governance arrangements. However, when these arrangements break down, situations can 'tip' over into large-scale, chronic violence and instability. Where this has happened, there appears to be a deepening crisis of trust between civilians and the institutions that govern the provision of essential services like housing, water and security. This tends to be more acute for groups that are already marginalised because of their gender, their socio-political identity or even their economic status, particularly when government actions aim to exert the rule of law through coercive measures.

The impact that urban violence and insecurity has on urban governance institutions can be described in three ways:

- Destructive – an erosion of the social contract and the governance institutions that uphold it, mirrors the direct loss of life, livelihood and property.
- Recursive – violence becomes ingrained into the fabric of urban life, degrading the functioning of urban institutions and is therefore reproduced.
- Productive – protracted violence and insecurity can necessitate the innovation of new norms and institutions.

Planning, policy or design interventions that misinterpret 'ordered cities' as synonymous with 'planned', or 'smart' cities are likely to create insecurity, not reduce it. Well-managed urbanisation, on the other hand, can revitalise urban spaces that had either been lost to violence or suffered from a lack of access to basic services and neglect. Implementing effective violence mitigation strategies therefore requires a wide range of stakeholders to:

- Acknowledge that there are many sources of insecurity in cities and that these can result from many types of urban violence;
- Understand how these sources of insecurity interact with the various socio-political arrangements that govern the provision of services, and in particular, security;
- Bring spatially relevant thinking to the arrangements by which political power is organised and exercised at the street-, city-, and national level.

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Policy recommendations

The key terms of inclusion needed to create safe cities which will adhere to the principles of the New Urban Agenda, drafted by an expert group of academic, practitioner and policy stakeholders at United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) include:

1. **Foster urban safety through inclusive policies and practices by:**
   (a) prioritising the voices of the most marginalised to articulate their own needs, (b) building their own capacities to create safe and secure spaces, both independently and through collective action, and (c) placing these at the core of a road-map towards fostering urban safety. It also involves supporting community champions, local thought leaders and social workers to continue to innovate local solutions to prevent violence.

2. **Use innovative measures to accurately understand people's vulnerabilities.**
   Field-tested methodologies, ranging from Participatory Urban Appraisals to Wellbeing, provide a workable set of principles to guide efforts to understand the vulnerabilities to violence and insecurity at street-, neighbourhood- or city levels, and how these vary by gender, age and identity. These methodologies can be integrated with community-driven self-monitoring practices to provide marginalised communities with critical real-time data to meet their own advocacy needs.

3. **Support evidence-gathering from small and medium-sized towns alongside larger cities; and analyse safe and resilient urban spaces alongside more fragile ones.**
   Real-time evidence is critical to the design and delivery of effective interventions. Evidence-gathering efforts should therefore be focused on small and medium-sized urban areas, as well as those experiencing humanitarian conditions.

4. **Prioritise securing, not securitising, urban spaces.**
   A strong and articulate stand against militaristic responses to urban violence, which have limited success and often create long-term instability, is required. Policies and programmes that are more likely to be successful in the long-run view urban violence and insecurity as public health issues and promote a sense of shared ownership over public spaces. Increasing the visibility, validity and voice of, for example, street traders, to inform legal, design, and planning frameworks to co-produce safe and secure workspaces in the city can revitalise neighbourhoods 'lost' to violence and neglect.

5. **Think inclusive when it comes to infrastructure.**
   The experiences of urban transformation for children and families highlight the importance of material and social connections between diverse urban spaces, crucial for social and economic prosperity, belonging, cohesion, safety and inclusion. Urban spaces should be visioned, designed and built considering the everyday lives, needs and desires of children, young people and their families.

6. **Police reform remains a key intervention route for national and city governments as well as aid agencies.**
   Urban security provision can no longer simply be reactionary in its application of force. It is an integrated challenge that involves more actors than the police. However, successful intervention strategies need to support building long-term credibility and legitimacy of police functioning and promote community–police collaborations.

7. **Inclusive cities and towns need to be welcoming of displaced people and other migrants, and be assured that others will do the same.**
   One significant challenge is coordinating and supporting inclusive policies that do not result in those cities or countries which agree to becoming more inclusive attracting a disproportionate share of migrants, or subsidising those who migrate to cities over those who, in the case of rural–urban migration, remain in rural areas. This is a big challenge, but not nearly as big as dealing with the divisions and conflicts that can otherwise result.

Further reading

Gupte, J. (2016) *Creating Safe and Inclusive Cities that Leave No One Behind: Position Paper for Habitat III*, Brighton: IDS, www.ids.ac.uk/publication/creating-safe-and-inclusive-cities-that-leave-no-one-behind-seven-key-pathways-to-actualising-the-principles-of-the-new-urban-agenda

Desai, R. and Sanyal, R. (eds) (2011) *Urbanizing Citizenship: Contested Spaces in Indian Cities*, New Delhi: Sage

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