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Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality  
**INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT BRIEF**

**#2**  
March 2021

**Localising the  
Sustainable Development Goals:  
An Urban Equality Perspective**

By Stephanie Butcher, Camila Cociña,  
Christopher Yap & Caren Levy



UK Research  
and Innovation



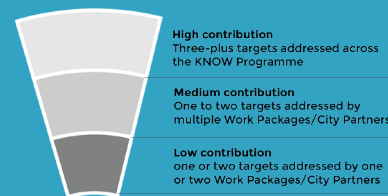
THE BARTLETT

The concept, content and edition of this brief were developed by KNOW Research Fellows **Stephanie Butcher, Camila Cociña, Christopher Yap, and Caren Levy**, drawing on the work and discussions of the **KNOW team**, and with direct support from **Alexandre Apsan Frediani** and **Michele Acuto**. The layout was developed by KNOW. All photographs were taken by KNOW team. **London, March 2021.**

This work has been collaboratively produced between Work Package 2 and Work Package 4 of the KNOW programme, focused on understanding how key global aspirations of resilience, poverty, and prosperity can be pursued through an urban equality lens, and localised through the SDGs. Through the generation of actionable knowledge, the KNOW programme seeks to contribute to a number of SDG goals.

**KNOW Programme and the SDGs**

Indicative level of contributions to SDG targets addressed by KNOW Work Packages and City Partners



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**Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW)** is a 4-year research and capacity building programme (2017-2021) that seeks to promote urban equality in selected cities in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Led by Prof Caren Levy of The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, it brings together an interdisciplinary international team of 13 partners in the UK, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Australia to develop innovative long-term programmes of knowledge co-production for urban equality among governments, communities, business, and academia. It is a unique gathering of places, people and their knowledge, innovation, and ingenuity. KNOW is funded by the ESRC under the Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF), a £1.5 billion research programme which forms part of the UK Aid Strategy.

For more information visit:  
[www.urban-know.com](http://www.urban-know.com)

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**SUMMARY**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a call for a transformative global agenda, outlining a clear commitment to inclusive, sustainable, and just global processes. In particular, the SDGs emphasis on ‘leaving no one behind’ demands a deep engagement with the urbanisation of inequalities, one of the most pressing challenges we face today. As such, the SDGs are a crucial tool in achieving more just urban futures.

However, the SDG framework also contains a diversity of positions and assumptions across its 17 Goals, 169 targets, and 231 unique indicators—reflecting different understandings of contested concepts such as sustainability, resilience, and equality. As such, the extent to which localisation processes are able to guide outcomes towards greater urban equality will depend upon how these goals and targets are interpreted and actioned within distinct national and local contexts and narratives.

This brief outlines the case for the adoption of an urban equality lens to orient decision-making through localisation processes. We ground our understanding in a multi-dimensional and relational concept of ‘urban equality’, reflecting interrelated dimensions of: distribution, recognition, parity of participation, and solidarity and mutual care.

Drawing on grounded examples of research and practice across a range of cities, this brief outlines three opportunities in the adoption of an urban equality lens: as a way to maximise positive synergies across the goals and targets; to deepen engagement with local specificity and aspirations; and to re-orient local and global processes towards truly inclusive outcomes. This brief concludes by setting out four principles to support the operationalisation of an urban equality lens through the SDGs.

# 1. Introduction

The 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as a universal framework, represents a call for a transformative global agenda. Across its 17 Goals, 169 targets, and 231 unique indicators, the '2030 Agenda' charts a vision to 'leave no one behind', outlining a clear commitment to inclusive, sustainable, and just global processes. Following on from the era of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SDGs are more ambitious, more wide reaching, and critically, are applicable across all countries, representing an 'historic shift' in how 'development' is conceived (Revi, 2016).

In particular, the SDG emphasis on 'leaving no person and no place behind' is a significant shift from the MDGs, which were sometimes criticised for targeting the 'low hanging fruit' of easier to reach populations, leaving behind those with the most complex and intersectional vulnerabilities (Stuart & Woodroffe, 2016). Likewise, the development of the SDGs has been lauded as a transparent and inclusive process, drawing together diverse actors through parallel, interrelated work streams, including representatives from across civil society, grassroots groups, local and national governments, academics, and the private sector (Klopp & Petretta, 2017; Cociña et al., 2019). In this sense, the SDGs represent a crucial global consensus towards shared developmental goals – adding critical new dimensions such as climate action (Goal 13), the reduction of inequalities (Goal 10), and sustainable urbanisation (Goal 11).

Yet beyond the value of the SDGs as a universal framework to guide development aims and action, much will depend on how these goals and targets are localised within distinct national and local contexts and narratives. As such, the 2030 Agenda both shapes, and is shaped by, the ways it is interpreted and actioned by multilateral agencies, national and local governments, and non-governmental

and civil society organisations. Crucially, then, the 2030 Agenda may also reflect diverse and potentially conflicting conceptions of sustainable development that exist between stakeholders and goals at multiple levels.

**As we move forward with localisation, and in an urbanised world, this Brief advocates for the adoption of an urban equality lens to guide the realisation and localisation of the SDGs. We argue this approach can help navigate potential contradictions, gaps, and tensions within the SDG framework, and as an orientation to inform decision-making processes.**

This brief proceeds by firstly outlining the case for urban equalities as a lens to 'read' the SDGs. We ground our understanding in a multi-dimensional and relational concept of 'urban equality', drawing on the work of the Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) programme. The brief then explores **three opportunities** of localising the SDGs from an urban equality perspective:

- **Navigating synergies and tensions across the goals**
- **Navigating between the universal and the specific**
- **Navigating the 'inclusion' agenda**

The Brief invites the adoption of an Urban Equality lens to support localisation processes, drawing examples from the grounded activities of KNOW partners. Finally, this brief concludes with a set of **actionable principles** for localising SDGs from an urban equality perspective.

# Defining Urban Equality

Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) recognises the context-specific form that urban equality will take in each city. However, KNOW works with a living definition of urban equality that includes four broad and interrelated dimensions:

**Equitable distribution:** A city that ensures equitable access to income and basic services for all citizens in a sustainable manner;

**Reciprocal recognition:** City institutions, urban practitioners and an urban citizenry that recognise different social identities and the environment in the way they co-produce knowledge; organise collectively; and plan, operate and manage urban activities;

**Solidarity and mutual care:** A city that prioritises mutual support and relational responsibilities between urban citizens and between citizens and nature, and actively nurtures the civic life of the city;

**Parity of political participation:** A city that actively engages citizens representative of the diversity of groups in society in deliberations and decisions about the current and future city.

Source: [In the KNOW, Issue #3](#)

## 2. Why focus on Urban Equalities?

The SDGs emphasis on inclusive global development demands a deep engagement with urban inequalities. The United Nations estimates that by 2050, 68% of the world's population will live in urban areas, with three-quarters of cities estimated to be more unequal today than in 1996 (DESA-UNPD, 2019). This **urbanisation of inequalities** means that development challenges are, and will increasingly be, concentrated in urban areas. These impacts are experienced across cities of the global North and South alike, but are nowhere more evident than in growing informal settlements – predominantly across cities in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. These already-pressing challenges have been extended and deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic, with [the World Bank](#) estimating that 88-115 million

more people were pushed into 'extreme poverty' as a direct result of the crisis in 2020 alone. The pandemic has also drawn urgent attention to the ways that risks and vulnerabilities associated with different identities, including race, gender, sexuality, and age, amongst others, interact and intersect with one other, as well as the ways that the impacts of COVID-19 are unequally distributed and experienced differently by different groups at different times. This demands an 'intersectionality approach' that recognises, analyses, and addresses the interplay between different vulnerabilities and advantages (Hankivsky & Kapilashrami, 2020).

The critical necessity of addressing these overlapping issues is recognised within the SDGs, with the standalone goals to “reduce inequality within and among countries” (Goal 10), and to achieve “sustainable cities and communities” (Goal 11). Similarly, a range of targets sit across the Agenda, which might be leveraged towards the aims of urban equality (Table 1).

**Table 1**

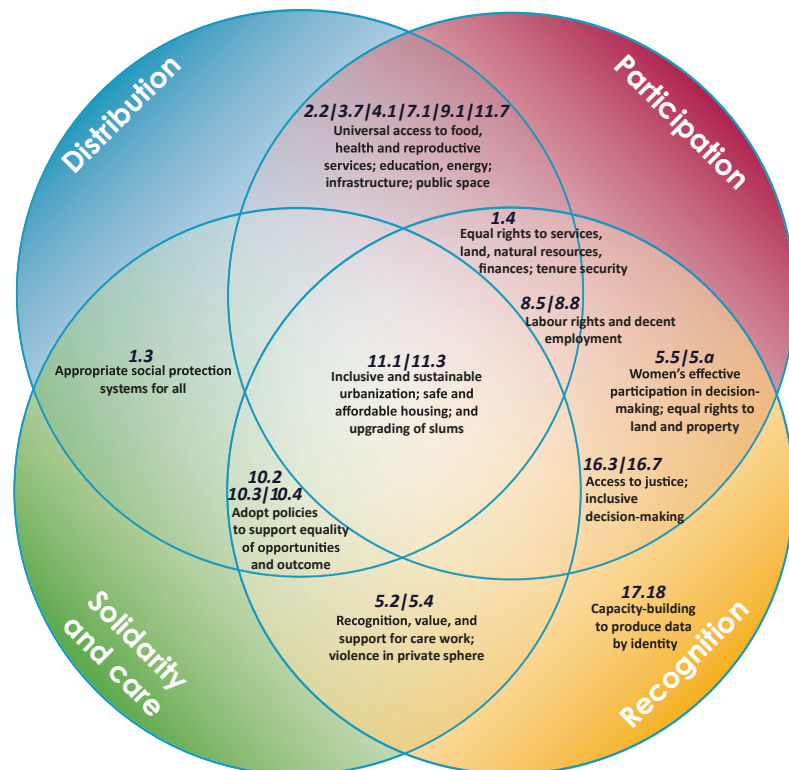
*Urban equality outcomes located across the SDGs.*

Outcomes	Goal/Target
Appropriate <b>social protection systems for all</b>	<b>1.3</b>
<b>Equal rights</b> (esp. of poor and vulnerable) to services, land, natural resources, and finances; perception of <b>tenure security</b>	<b>1.4</b>
<b>Universal access</b> to sufficient food, health and reproductive services; education, energy; infrastructure; public space	<b>2.2; 3.7; 4.1; 7.1; 9.1; 11.7</b>
Women's full and effective <b>participation in decision-making</b> ; equal rights to land and property	<b>5.5; 5.a</b>
Recognition, value, and support for <b>care work</b> ; violence in <b>private sphere</b>	<b>5.2; 5.4</b>
<b>Labour rights</b> and decent employment (including migrants)	<b>8.5; 8.8</b>
Adopt policies to support equality of <b>opportunities</b> and <b>outcome</b> , irrespective of <b>status</b>	<b>10.2; 10.3; 10.4</b>
<b>Inclusive and sustainable</b> urbanization; safe and affordable housing; and <b>upgrading of slums</b>	<b>11.1; 11.3</b>
Access to <b>justice for all</b> ; <b>inclusive, participatory</b> decision-making	<b>16.3; 16.7</b>
Capacity-building to produce <b>data disaggregated by identity</b>	<b>17.18</b>

Source: *Compiled by authors*

The interrelationships between different dimensions of urban equality can be useful for understanding the interactions between the SDG targets. These include targets focused on **distribution** aspects: including equitable access to basic services, housing, healthcare, and public space; **recognition** aspects: linked with gender equality and recognition of diverse identities, and aims to build capacities to disaggregate measurements across identity; **solidarity and mutual care** aspects: linked with calls for partnership between different actors to advance the goals, the recognition of care work in the private sphere, and calls for social protection systems; and **participation** aspects: linked with strengthening spaces of participation in planning and governance, access to justice, and civic education. However, as Figure 1 also makes clear, many of the targets exist across the dimensions of urban equality.

**Figure 1**  
Locating urban equality outcomes in the SDGs within KNOW dimensions.



**We suggest that the four dimensions of equality can support the realisation of the transformative aims of the SDGs:**

- **The principle of equitable distribution** pushes us to consider issues of access beyond availability, and to consider how the uneven distribution of resources is required to achieve more equitable outcomes across the Goals. This principle reminds us that when implementing the SDGs, the way that resources are allocated is as important as the distribution of entitlements and the structural constraints that prevent some groups from realising their rights.
- **The principle of reciprocal recognition** reminds us that interventions related to water provision, healthcare provision, and other areas will impact differently on different populations, in different places and at different times, depending on their gender, class, age, ethnicity, race, ability, or other aspects of identity. This principle invites us to consider how access 'for all' demands a diversity of heterogeneous responses in order to reflect a variety of intersecting social identities which give rise to specific vulnerabilities, pushing us to rethink the SDG targets and indicators as dynamic and specific, rather than fixed and universal. The principle urges us to engage with the relational qualities of identity, how this is reflected in inequalities related to knowledge, access, and power in cities, and the ways that these issues reflect historical injustices as much as contemporary dynamics of marginalisation.
- **The principle of solidarity and mutual care** urges us to engage with the multiplicity of collaborative ways in which people are locally advancing towards transformative outcomes, and which may not necessarily be recognised in the formulation of the SDGs. This principle draws attention to the vital role of building alliances across difference, establishing infrastructures of social protection, mutual aid and collective organising, and the importance of intangible dimensions such as wellbeing, autonomy, or belonging, which shape urban experiences.
- And finally, **the principle of parity of political participation** invites us to think about the way that governance structures vary significantly across the goals' intervention areas, and that by promoting parity of participation in decision-making processes at all levels and across these areas, efforts to realise the goals might better reflect the needs of diverse groups. It encourages us to recognise that beyond the state, groups of urban residents –through research, practices, and activism– are generating and populating new political spaces through which to challenge structural inequalities. Moreover, it pushes us to focus not only on development outcomes, but the processes through which such outcomes are reached as key indicators of inclusive sustainable development.

### 3. Localising an Urban Equality lens: Three opportunities

Despite the clear potentials of the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs contain a range of positions and assumptions —reflecting different understandings of contested concepts such as sustainability, resilience, and equality (Borie et al., 2019). While addressing poverty, inequalities and urban sustainability features across many goals and targets, the Agenda does not always well-acknowledge the relations which structure inequality —the multi-scalar social, political, and economic processes that contribute to uneven concentrations of wealth, decision-making authority, knowledge, and social status, across gender, race, class, or other identity dimensions (Butcher, 2021).

These diverse epistemological positions, assumptions and ambiguities —which may be hidden within the consensus-building processes of the SDG framework<sup>1</sup>— are likely to become more pronounced as the SDGs are interpreted and actioned by a range of different actors at different scales (Barnett & Parnell, 2016; Caprotti et al., 2017). Indeed, managing the interactions between the SDGs generates particular challenges at the local level, as it requires coordination across diverse local conditions and actors at multiple levels, with different capacities, values, and mandates, and which are differently enabled and constrained by the specific geographical and institutional contexts in which they operate.

We know that there are experiences of non-governmental organisations and departments in local government that form partnerships to, for example, extend access to clean water and sanitation to socially marginalised and otherwise vulnerable groups. We must recognise that non-governmental organisations and local governments have

<sup>1</sup> The wording of the Goals was developed through the United Nations Open Working Group on Sustainable Development over fourteen sessions across 2013-14, framed and influenced by outcomes from other High-Level processes.

their own distinct structures, procedures, hierarchies, and cultures, amongst many other factors, each of which varies with context. Such differences can be highly generative, however the multiplication of the relationships that are necessary to achieve such an ambitious global Agenda —across goals, sectors, contexts, and scales— represents a significant challenge to the realisation of the SDGs.

**As the localisation of the SDG Agenda takes place, a key question is: how are these diverse values negotiated, and whose vision is being implemented? With this in mind, we highlight three tensions in the localisation of SDGs, and the opportunities opened up by the adoption of Urban Equality as a normative lens to navigate these challenges.**





## OPPORTUNITY #1

# Navigating synergies and tensions across the goals

The potential for both *synergies* and *contradictions* across the various goals and targets is well-documented (Kroll, et al, 2019; Valencia et al, 2019; Waage et al., 2015). In some cases, there are clear synergies —such as between education (Goal 4) and gender equality (Goal 5) (Mayhew et al, 2015). In others, there are potential contradictions, such as between goals related to decent work and economic growth (Goal 8) and climate action (Goal 13) (Hickel, 2019). Finally, there are many instances where interactions between efforts to achieve the SDGs are well-recognised, if not well understood, such as the interactions between industry, innovation, and infrastructure (Goal 9), and sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11) (Mantlana & Maoela, 2020). While it is well-acknowledged that the goals should be read holistically, the potential trade-offs mean that certain goals or targets might be pursued in a fashion that simultaneously compromises the equality outcomes of marginalised or excluded groups (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016).

For instance, the target of eradicating extreme poverty by 2030 appears explicitly within Goal 1, measured in terms of the proportion of the world's population living below the extreme poverty income line (currently \$1.90 per day). However, recognising that extreme poverty is a multidimensional set of issues that shifts with context (Yap & McFarlane, 2020) we can see that several SDGs make critical contributions towards eradicating extreme poverty, such as Goal 3 (Good health and wellbeing) and Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation). As such, efforts to eradicate extreme poverty require collective diagnoses and interventions across multiple sectors, which address the diverse social, economic, and political reasons that some groups can access these services and others cannot. Likewise, it is crucial to examine the impact of interventions at the city-scale, for how they may

be contradictorily experienced —where, for instance, interventions aimed at sustaining economic growth may simultaneously exclude marginalised or vulnerable populations (Razavi, 2016).

**We argue that adopting an Urban Equality lens offers an opportunity to guide decision-making through these contradictions, and enact holistic interventions, orienting localisation processes towards more just and sustainable futures.**

For example, in [Lima, Peru](#), 0.7% of the population were considered to be in extreme poverty in 2017, calculated as those living on less than US\$67 per month. However, in the same year the Ministry of Economy and Finance calculated that 8.2% of Lima's residents were unable to meet one or more of five basic needs relating to housing, overcrowding, access to sewerage, economic dependence, and whether children attended school (INEI, 2018). As such, it is clear that interventions to address extreme poverty in this context must take into account

these multiple and overlapping issues. Likewise, achieving this goal requires looking beyond the experiences of poverty (overcrowding, inadequate access to services), to also pinpoint the wider drivers through which these deprivations are produced. In Lima's peripheries, for example, households that obtain water from water trucks can pay up to ten times as much per litre when compared to households connected to pipes; a product of deep infrastructural inequalities, and inadequate investment in peripheral areas. Moreover, the informal expansion of the city into the urban periphery, specifically onto the *lomas costeras* - coastal slopes that trap humidity - negatively impacts on the city's capacity to recharge its aquifers, with the potential to further exacerbate the availability of water in the city (Allen et al, 2017).



An **urban equality lens** draws attention to the ways that poverty in Lima is caused by the confluence of social, political, and ecological issues. That is, eradicating poverty by, for example, improving access to basic services, must move beyond distributional inequalities in water, sewerage, education, or housing. It must likewise engage with the ways that decisions are made within the city regarding the distribution of infrastructure: who is part of the process through which infrastructure is developed, and resources are allocated across the city?

Eradicating poverty, through a lens of urban equality, then, offers the opportunity to engage with this complexity—recognising the interlinked relationships between the distribution of basic services and the distribution of risk across the city, which are compounded by issues arising from diverse vulnerabilities across different groups, and a lack of parity in political decision-making processes. Exploring and addressing these synergies and trade-offs is crucial throughout localisation approaches, to better address the compounded ways in which vulnerabilities are experienced in everyday life.



## OPPORTUNITY #2

# Navigating between the universal and the specific

Second, are tensions which emerge between the ‘*universal*’ adoption of the Agenda—one of its core strengths—and the need to localise and adapt the framework to *specific* socio-political contexts. That is, the SDGs provide an aspirational roadmap through its various goals and targets, as well as key benchmarks to measure, via its indicators. In adopting these universal baselines, the SDGs offer an important redefinition of developmental challenges as applicable across nations of the so-called global North and South alike.

However, as various localisation processes have started to take place, debates have emerged as to how to best modify and adapt the framework to reflect distinct cultural values, aspirations, historical processes, or political contexts. Increasingly, ‘Southern’ knowledge traditions have highlighted the importance of the specificity and rootedness of place, drawing attention to the inequitable and often Western-centric circulation of knowledge which has shaped urban policy and planning approaches (Roy, 2009; Bhan, 2019; Watson, 2016). These traditions raise important questions as to how well ‘universal’ frameworks can reflect the localised realities and global systems which have generated inequities. Likewise, questions have emerged regarding the ‘political’ negotiation process which informed the goals and targets, and the ‘technical’ development of indicators, which was managed by the UN Statistical Commission (Fukuda-Parr, 2019). These different pathways through which the targets and indicators were developed mean that the targets, even where more broad-reaching or aspirational, may sometimes be diluted through the process of monitoring and measurement of the indicators, or may not reflect the range of locally-specific values or assumptions which underpin different developmental challenges.

**We argue that an Urban Equality lens can act as a guideline to support the ongoing local articulation of goals, targets, and monitoring and measurement across diverse contexts, emphasising that the process through which goals are locally interpreted and measured is as important as their outcomes.**



For instance, work within the KNOW programme on rethinking prosperity as a holistic and multidimensional conception of ‘the good life’, which shifts with context, offers some useful insights as to the critical importance of involving diverse residents in the local articulation of wider goals and indicators. Grounded activities with residents of informal settlements in collaboration with the Centre for Community Initiatives (CCI) in [Dar es Salaam, Tanzania](#), have revealed that indicators for prosperity might relate to a broad range of domains, including

“healthy neighbourhoods” and “power, voice, and influence” (Woodcraft et al, 2020). While these dimensions are crucial to understanding the range of aspirations and values of urban poor communities, such multidimensional concepts of prosperity are not explicitly reflected across the goals, targets, or indicators of the SDGs. An urban equality lens that brings to the forefront issues of reciprocal recognition can facilitate the acknowledgement of such values in the implementation of the Agenda. Engaging with interventions which can speak to these crucial –but often intangible, or unrecognised– dimensions is key to obtaining the aims of the 2030 Agenda to: “ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives” (UN, 2015).

An **urban equality lens** calls for attention not only to achieving the outcomes linked with the SDGs, but also the processes through which

they are understood, measured and addressed. Engaging in inclusive and participatory processes to meet the goals, targets and indicators can: reveal context-specific understandings of the dimensions and values of the SDGs as a part of the localisation process, recognise the range of heterogeneous ways in which developmental challenges are experienced across identities, reveal additional intangible dimensions that are crucial to human flourishing, and support community and citizens groups to collectively organise and engage in decision-making in the city. In doing so, localisation processes can both speak to the universal aims of the agenda, while also remaining deeply embedded in local trajectories and processes which have generated injustices across identities over time.



## OPPORTUNITY #3

# Navigating the ‘inclusion’ agenda

Third, the emphasis on ‘*inclusion*’ within the 2030 Agenda has sometimes been critiqued for retaining the ‘poverty’ lens of the MDGs – focused on expanding access of excluded groups, without addressing the broader global relations through which inequalities are produced (Kaika, 2017). For example, target 1.4 aims to: ‘ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance’. However, such an ambitious target can only be achieved if the historical, structural injustices through which poor and vulnerable groups, intersected by gender, class, race, religion, ability, or other identity dimensions, are addressed. While there are a number of crucial goals linked with ‘inclusion’ – aimed at expanding the rights, recognition, and services to excluded groups— it is also silent on those redistributive aspects, such as regulations on tax havens, global debt relief, or processes of commodification and financialisation of land, housing, and services. These relations which structure inequalities are intimately linked with many of the specific targets expressed through the 2030 Agenda.

**An Urban Equality lens helps to position many of the ‘inclusion’ aspects of the 2030 Agenda within the wider political economy of the city. In particular, the adoption of this framing can draw attention to those urban legacies and processes which have generated social and spatial injustices over time.**

Demonstrating practices that contest some of these exclusionary processes, for instance, is work carried out across diverse Asian cities, by the [Asian Coalition of Housing Rights \(ACHR\)](#). While adopting different modalities across different cities, crucial to the ethos of these networked grassroots, NGOs, and research actors is the emphasis on trialing collective forms of housing, tenure, and finance for urban poor groups (Anzorena et al., 1998; Boonyabancha, 2009). In particular, the adoption of community savings and loans schemes, and exploration of cooperative and collective forms of tenure, has challenged the notion of land as an individual economic asset, safeguarding these social goods from predatory market forces (Pérez-Castro and Boonyabancha, 2019). In doing so, ACHR groups have directly modelled alternative modes of producing the city, challenging mainstream trends, such as the individualised commodification of land, that have divested urban poor residents from land, housing, or services. By challenging these structural inequalities around land and housing, through proactive and collaborative solution-making and showing new possibilities, these approaches likewise have supported a rethink of inequitable relations: between landlords and tenants, urban poor groups and wealthier neighbourhoods, community leaders and urban policy-makers, while a strong emphasis on women’s mobilisation and leadership has challenged patriarchal norms within households and communities. The ACHR approach demonstrates the possibilities of interventions which move beyond some of the distributive aspects of the 2030 Agenda when adopting an urban equality lens –linked with expanding collective access to land tenure, urban services, and adequate housing– to demonstrate the pathways through which a transformative approach to inclusion might be achieved.

An **urban equality lens** reveals that localisation processes aimed at fulfilling the aims of ‘leaving no one and no place behind’ requires more



than interventions which target urban poor groups or marginalised communities. It requires positioning these inequalities within wider relations of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy, which have devalued certain groups, and excluded them from resources, political processes, and urban space. Likewise, seeking inclusion requires addressing how social inequalities are experienced in everyday practices—connecting household and community relations to global processes, with a deep attention to how gender, class, race, and other social identities generate intersecting deprivations.

**“Creating global standards and principles, while at the same time allowing for specificities on the ground—and addressing the inequalities of power around those different knowledges—is enormously challenging, but crucial to shaping pathways to urban equality across scale.”**

**Prof Caren Levy**  
Principal Investigator KNOW Programme  
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# THAILAND



## 4. Principles: An Urban Equality lens as a way of reading and actioning the SDGs

The reflections above indicate that while the SDGs are a powerful political framework, much will depend upon how they are interpreted and localised within diverse contexts. Therefore, we conclude with **four principles** which can support the operationalisation of an urban equality lens through the SDGs:

### **Attention to the broader political economy of the city.**

Doing so requires centring those historical and current urban processes which have produced inequalities over time. This entails recognising that important **distributional** aims of urban equality –through targets linked with ‘universal’ access to basic services, energy, health, tenure security– cannot be achieved without also addressing trends such as the commodification of land and housing, privatisation of basic services, or the precarity of labour rights and conditions, which may not be explicit throughout the agenda.

### **Engaging in solidarity to nurture the civic life of the city.**

A focus on nurturing **care and solidarity** draws attention to some of the missing dimensions in the SDGs which are nonetheless crucial to the aims of urban equality. Aspirations such as autonomy, self-determination, belonging, equilibrium with nature, or confidence are often strongly articulated through lived experiences, particularly the struggles of excluded groups. Engaging with such visions which emerge from specific contexts and realities is fundamental in the construction of pathways towards a ‘transformative’ agenda.

### **Nurturing partnerships and collective decision-making across sectors and with diverse stakeholders.**

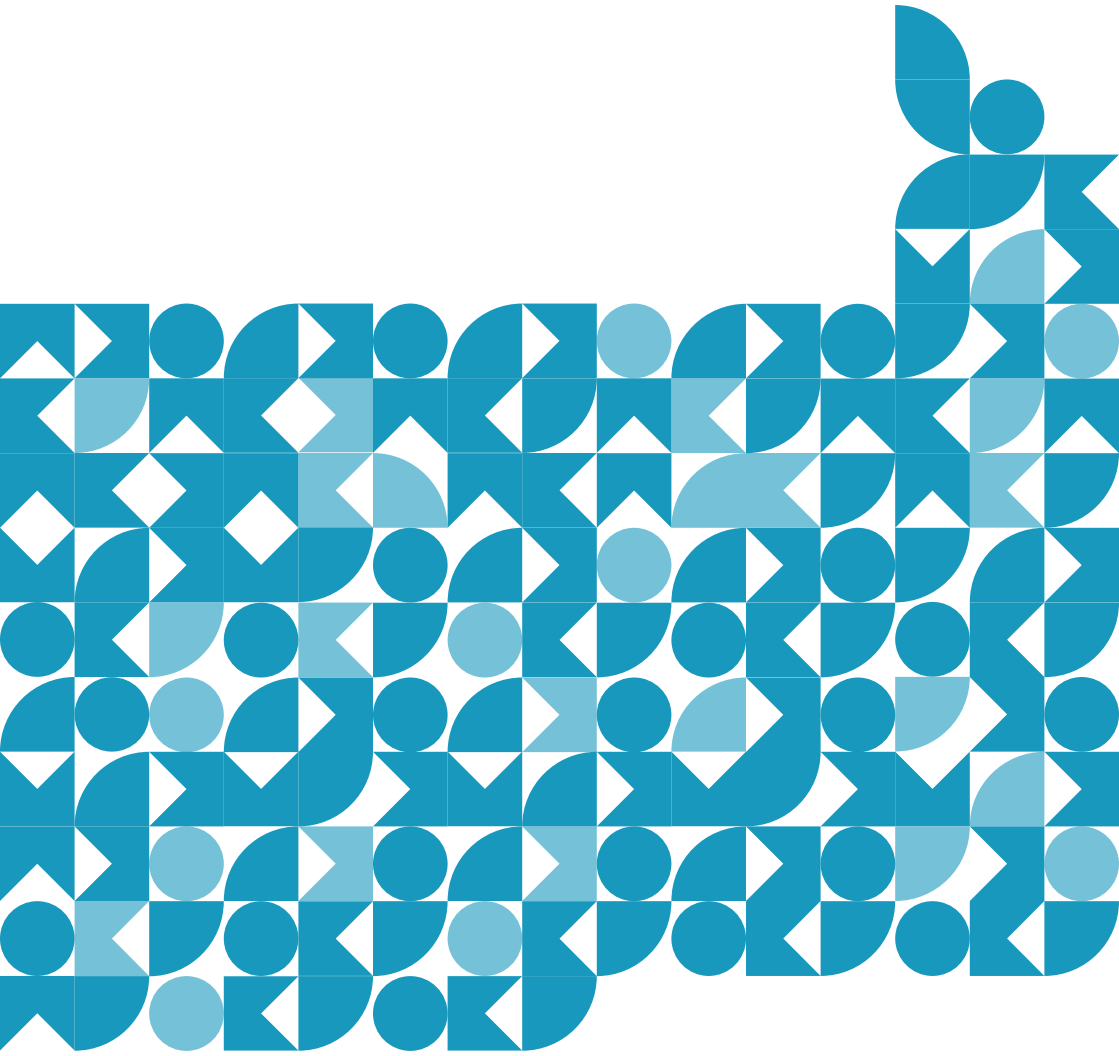
While the implementation of the SDGs is aimed at governments, the realisation of the goals demands action from and coordination with a range of institutions such as NGOs, social movements, CBOs, the private sector, or academic institutions. Likewise, the multidimensionality of an urban equality lens enables us to overcome the sectoral nature of the SDGs, thinking across levels, regions, interests and relations. Leveraging on targets linked with participation in planning, governance, and the community management of services, while actively centring voices that historically have been marginalised, can support a deeper **parity of participation**.

### **Recognising relations of power in the analysis, development and monitoring of strategies**

that meet the ambitious aims of the SDGs. In particular, an urban equality lens requires a close engagement with and **recognition** of the aspirations, knowledge, and preferences of urban poor groups in the negotiations of trade-offs and contradictions throughout the agenda. An emphasis on ‘reciprocal’ recognition calls for renewed support not only in addressing the intersectional needs of diverse groups, but also in supporting the claims-making practices of organised groups. In particular, this calls for the adoption of innovative and grounded methodologies through which marginalised groups can articulate locally-relevant visions, measurements, and approaches, to fulfil the transformative aims of the 2030 Agenda.

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