

GOLD VI

**Case-Based Contribution
to Chapter 6: Connecting**
*GOLD VI Report on Pathways
to urban and territorial equality*

**Civic urban media: Creating
and sharing bottom-up knowledge
on cities to shape urban policies**

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Civic urban media: Creating and sharing bottom-up knowledge on cities to shape urban policies

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ORGANISATION NAME

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CITIES/COUNTRIES IT COVERS:

Rio de Janeiro (Brazil); Bristol (United Kingdom); Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

CHAPTER

6: Connecting

SUMMARY

Citizens and urban dwellers connect, communicate and tell stories by using different media such as radio, photography and video to increase the recognition of their local struggles towards social justice, participation and the right to the city. These civic media and storytelling practices directly relate to the processes shaping urban politics and urban planning and contribute to producing the (counter-)narratives of the city. Acknowledging the potential of civic urban media in challenging the representations of the urban poor and urban residents, and in enhancing collaboration among citizens in voicing their claims, civic urban media initiatives have emerged in a variety of places and contexts. They contribute to creating grassroots/ bottom-up knowledge on cities with the aim to shape urban policies and politics but also showcase alternative ways of making and managing media towards more cooperation and community control. This contribution looks at three cases of civic urban media from various countries in Africa, as well as the UK and Brazil.

Slum Dwellers International and CoHabitat Network.
“Civic urban media: Creating and sharing bottom-up
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Know Your City TV - a youth media initiative in Africa

Slum Dwellers International (SDI) is a grassroots-led network of urban poor federations mobilising, organising, partnering, and negotiating for pro-poor participatory urban development that puts the rights and dignity of the urban poor at the centre. In 2016, in response to the growing need to reach youth populations and prioritise youth voices in SDI's work, SDI launched Know Your City TV - a youth media programme that today has taken root across the SDI network. This work has been motivated as well by the recognized need to ensure the continued relevance and sustainability of SDI through the mentorship of new, younger leaders. The hope was that equipped and trained media makers from informal settlements would be able to share stories of hope and resilience to counter the prevalent narrative which paints slum dwellers as passive victims instead of demonstrating their role as agents for constructive change.

Building on SDI's strong data gathering tradition, a social media campaign titled Know Your City TV (KYC.TV) was piloted in Uganda, Ghana, and South Africa. This produced a series of short documentaries, which clearly resonated with youth federations in other countries. Before very long, KYC.TV crews had sprung up organically in Kenya, Zimbabwe and Nigeria, followed by Zambia, Sierra Leone and Senegal and later Namibia, Botswana and Malawi.

Typically, youth with some experience will travel to neighbouring cities or countries on a learning exchange to share knowledge and experience with emerging media teams there. They learn by doing, making media for change on cell phones, basic DSLR cameras and evolving to more advanced



equipment, lenses and mics as their skills and interests grow. The output of these crews varies from simple documentation tasks (photographs of upgrading projects and other federation activities) and social media campaigns to high-end documentary shorts and even a full-length fiction feature film.

Low social expenditure and lack of infrastructure limits access to jobs, economic opportunities, and social networks for the urban poor youth. Training and skills that equip young people for work in a new type of economy are in high demand among youth themselves but less appreciated by their parents. This highlights the information gaps and divide between digital natives and older generations. COVID-19 came and turned that all upside down. For all the misery and pain of the pandemic and the often-problematic government responses to it, the pandemic has highlighted the value and necessity of connection and the potential of the digital realm to create new dynamic opportunities for connection that may not be possible otherwise, especially now.

Film making for change in Kampala (Uganda).
Source: Allan Mawejeje, KYCTV Uganda, SDI

In response to the changing context of the world, KYC.TV trainings have also pivoted to virtual exchanges and online learning. Despite some initial hurdles, this new way of exchanging learnings has, overall, increased the capacity for connection between our federation's youth. As urban poor communities across the global South slowly begin to recover from the shocks of this disruption, it seems likely that they will continue to make use of many of the technologies they have been forced to adapt to during these times. As always, the degree to which these technologies create opportunities for meaningful engagement between urban poor communities - in particular, the youth - and the stakeholders who make decisions that affect their lives depends in large part on the political will of those in power to use opportunities for connection as a means to shift the status quo. Without this level of political will on the part of those in power, we have found that even in an ever increasingly connected world, the voice and experience of the urban poor - and especially urban poor youth - can continue to be viewed as nice to have rather than an essential ingredient to any kind of meaningful change.

The slogan for KYC.TV is "Make media, make change," highlighting the brave and willing spirit of the urban poor youth to embrace and catalyse change. These young people are amongst the world's most vulnerable when it comes to living with the consequences of and facing grave threats from both climate disasters and economic inequality. And yet their voice remains close to invisible in nearly all significant global debates, dialogues and decision-making platforms.

The experience of the past few years has certainly demonstrated that connection through learning exchange and knowledge creation and sharing in the form of both hard

data and rich stories are critical if we are to effectively meet the daily challenges and future shocks that will surely follow from this pandemic. Indeed, the experience of COVID-19 has demonstrated, perhaps more than anything else, the interconnectedness of our world and the need to prioritise and make positive use of connection to create the changes we need for a more inclusive, resilient, sustainable future for all.

Urban flooding in Lusaka (Zambia).
Source: Micheal Chanda (Mac Tavish the Poet),
KYCTV Zambia, SDI.



Development, one brick at a time in Windhoek (Namibia).
Source: Imelda Munika, KYCTV Namibia, SDI.

The Bristol Cable - community owned media in the United Kingdom

The Bristol Cable is a community owned local media cooperative focusing on the city of Bristol, United Kingdom. It was set up in 2014 in response to a crisis of quality journalism and the concentration of media ownership. The control of media in the hands of a few people and corporations with vested private interests is highly problematic, given the impact that media can have over our perception of the places in which we live, how we relate to others, and how society and the economy work. In contrast, the Cable intended “to create commonly owned public-interest journalism, produced by a wide range of people”, as explained by co-founder A. Cantwell-Corn.

Another concern was the lack of diversity of voices in the media, along with the negative stereotyping of marginalized groups such as homeless people, migrants and refugees, people with poor mental health, lower-income people, and so on. The Cable tackled this by organising journalism workshops across Bristol to engage with a range of local people and communities, and to ensure a wide range of voices were included in the Cable’s content and processes from the very beginning.

Today the Cable is entirely owned by local citizens (2,400 members in 2021), who each contribute small monthly payments to fund the organisation. The Cable publishes journalism in print and online including articles, podcasts and videos, which are free for all to access.

They enable citizen participation in media production as members vote on editorial campaigns, stand for elections for the board of non-executive directors, input into strategic choices and help steer the general direction of the organization. This is ensured through a mix of in-person and digital engagement methodologies. The Cable also regularly



partners with charities, community groups and other publications.

In terms of impact, the membership model enables the Cable to investigate stories that could be risky to dig into, but that can ensure transparency and information for citizens, and contribute to improving the city. Some examples of actions resulting from investigations include: changes in Bristol City Council policies on bailiffs and increased transparency over controversial housing developments, criminal cases after exposing modern day slavery working conditions, changes in police practices after uncovering human rights violations, and the provision of more information for fossil fuel divestment campaigns.

The Cable also works to increase opportunities for citizen empowerment through capacity building and platforms to have a voice. In particular, they run programmes to develop journalistic skills, such as the free Media Lab training course and the Early Career Journalist paid placements. Special attention is dedicated to involving people from marginalised backgrounds in these capacity building opportunities.

“Thank God for cameras, because I get to show you how I see the world. In Zimbabwe we have an ancient proverb: “Ziva kwawabva kwaunoenda husiku.” It basically translates to: “Know where you come from, because where you are going is a mystery to all.”
Source: Maxwell Chembezi, KYCTV Zimbabwe, SDI

RioOnWatch - changing the narrative on precarious settlements in Brazil

RioOnWatch is a citizen-led media initiative, launched by the Rio and US-based organization Catalytic Communities in 2010, with the ambition to “paint a more accurate picture of favelas, their contributions to the city, and the potential of favela-led community development in Rio and around the world”. While RioOnWatch was specifically set up to report on the 2016 Olympics taking place in **Rio de Janeiro** (Brazil) in 2016 - and on associated human rights abuses and stories covering some of Rio’s most precarious settlements -, the community journalism initiative has since then consolidated into a vehicle to increase the visibility of favela residents and their concerns in the framework of fast-paced urban transformations.

RioOnWatch is committed to showcasing not only the challenges faced by favela residents but also community-led solutions and organizational strategies developed by and for the residents. Beyond documenting and changing perceptions, the aim is to influence public opinion and policy for the benefit of favela residents, as well as popularizing urban planning concepts so citizens can dialogue more effectively with decision-makers and local governments.



Protest Nigeria Lagos KYCTV

References

KYC.TV

<http://www.knowyourcity.tv/>

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Civic urban Media

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The Bristol Cable:

<https://thebristolcable.org/>

RioOnWhatch

<https://www.rioonwatch.org/>

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In particular, the present paper has contributed to Chapter 6 on “Connecting”, which focuses on the role of local and regional governments in increasing urban and territorial equality through improving connectivity between and within cities and citizens through more equitable transport, infrastructure and digital connectivity planning and interventions.

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