# Upgrading basic service provision in informal settlements: city led, community led and commoning

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In particular, the present paper has contributed to Chapter 4 on 'Commoning', which focuses on the trends and pathways in relation to the governance, planning and provision of access to housing, land and basic services. Through the lens of 'commoning', the chapter explores how local and regional governments can promote approaches focused on collective action that contribute to urban equality.

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COMMONING

# Introduction

This paper explores how residents of informal settlements work together to get basic services or improvements in existing services and what this means for addressing inequality. It also examines the roles of different experiences with upgrading in commoning goods and services in the city, and the implications for the institutions that engage with them or are engaged by them.

The backdrop to this is more than one billion urban dwellers estimated to live in informal settlements, most lacking security of tenure, access to good quality services and living in poor and overcrowded conditions. At the moment, this adds up to ¼ of the world's urban population.[1] Given that most rapid growth of the world's population is taking place in informal settlements in cities of the Global South, the projections are that the share of world's population living in such locations is likely to increase.

A key driver of health, social and environmental risks and associated vulnerabilities of those living in informal settlements is the lack of adequate, reliable and affordable access to services. Irrespective of the tenure arrangements where urban inhabitants dwell, it is the responsibility of governments to ensure that all residents' rights are met – including access schools, health care, good quality provision for water, sanitation, household waste collection, public transport, policing, street lighting, among other services. As recognised in the human right to adequate housing, governments should guarantee that all people "have available services, materials, facilities and infrastructure, meaning that they should contain everything needed for human life and comfort, such as water, sanitation and energy".[2]

However, the barriers and enablers shaping access to services for informal settlement dwellers vary from city to city. Every city has its own unique mix of basic service provision – who gets it (or not), what they get, what role they have in what they get. Furthermore, there is a range of diverse experiences of how services are maintained and the nature of their connection to broader city infrastructure and systems. In many contexts, informal settlement dwellers lack a legal address or other documentation required to get connected to water and electricity and

access to schools or health centres. In other contexts, service bills' receipts have been used by informal dwellers to provide proof of address and of long-term residency in a particular place. Therefore, access to services is tied in complex and diverse ways to various sets of human rights and access to social protection.

Given the lack of government action to ensure the provision of basic services to informal settlement dwellers, non-government actors have become the main providers. Actors that have filled this void include residents and their community organizations, other civil society groups and existing (formal and informal) service providers, as well as other contractors. As a result, **informal settlements are localities with multiple co-existing systems of service provision**, where the quality as well as access is shaped by the way these various stakeholders act and interact. Under this condition, what should be the pathway for residents of informal settlements to improve their access to basic services: lobbying governments for services or setting up alternative service provision? Or a combination of these?

The experiences described in this paper demonstrate local and international pathways that can advance more equitable access to basic services in informal settlements. They have done so by setting precedents through collective and community-led processes of service provision, while at the same time holding local and regional governments to account by demonstrating the various roles they can play in this process. In other words, residents of informal settlements have been organizing, setting up their own forms of service provision, supporting others to do so – and then using these experiences to engage with local government to expand the scale and scope of what can be done in service provision working together. Rather than an end, in this context, the process of collectivisation of the provision of basic services has been a means to access resources needed for human flourishing. Therefore, **commoning has been a strategy to improve living conditions of marginalised groups while at the same time calling governments to play a more substantial and meaningful role in guaranteeing access to good quality and affordable basic services.**

1. The Shift. *The right to housing for residents of informal settlements, Ottawa*: IDRC 2021 https://www.make-the-shift.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/THESHIFT-plainreport-v2_compressed.pdf

2. The Shift 2021.

# 1. Upgrading as a commoning pathway for equality

This paper concentrates on informal settlement upgrading as the best documented way in which basic services get provided or improved in informal settlements and other low-income neighbourhoods. Also, upgrading brings possibilities of addressing many aspects of inequality including inequalities in health risks and health outcomes such as infant, child and maternal mortality. Indeed, upgrading, done well, can address many pressing health inequalities and their social, political, environmental and physical determinants.

In regard to health issues in informal settlements, there is a very large and growing literature of case studies of key health determinants (e.g., access to water and sanitation) and a smaller literature with case studies on specific health outcomes (e.g., TB, Dengue, COVID-19...). Both these sets generally have some discussion of inequality in comparing the settlements they worked in with other settlements. What is very rare is to have health-related data for all individuals and their locations (e.g. streets) – and city-wide coverage of health outcomes (providing data on causes of death for instance). It is also rare for upgrading programmes to see the value of data collection to set a baseline before the upgrading.[3]

"Few other measures have greater potential to transform the well-being of the urban poor than participatory, integrated slum-upgrading programs and policies. However,the health equity benefits of slum upgrading are rarely acknowledged... or analysed as part of project and policy impact evaluations."[4]

We can view upgrading with a risk reduction lens; see for instance the range of economic, social, environmental/physical and political determinants of health inequality. That is, viewing, upgrading as building the competence and capacity of local government to meet its responsibilities for the basic services mentioned above that are key determinants of health.

There is also the role of upgrading in response to the climate global emergency. **The IPCC has recognised that this role that upgrading has in addressing inequalities also contributes to building resilience to climate change**.[5] It notes that reducing basic service deficits could reduce hazard exposure, especially of the poor and vulnerable, alongside upgrading of informal settlements, improved housing conditions and enabling the agency of low-income communities. Upgrading includes what it terms risk-reducing infrastructure (paved roads, storm and surface drainage, piped water...) and services relevant to climate change resilience (including healthcare, emergency services, policing /rule of law) and the institutions needed for this. It also recognizes that community-driven "slum" or informal settlement upgrading can reduce risk and vulnerability to extreme weather events, most effectively when supported by local government and civil defence response agencies.[6]

When examining the role of upgrading in reducing inequalities, it is important to consider the various facets of inequality experienced in informal settlements (such as access to services, health determinants, health outcomes and right to an address). And crucially, it is important to examine who are experiencing these inequalities to address who faces discrimination.

## ► Baselines, Boundaries and reference groups

Any consideration of inequality needs to specify the group whose experience of inequality is of interest with the reference group against which this will be compared. So are we interested in equality in service provision among informal settlements or between formal and informal settlements? Or inequality globally, as service provision in upgrading schemes is assessed against universally applied standards? Or at the other extreme, are we interested in inequality within the informal settlement being upgraded – for instance by gender, age and other social identities? But what to do if there is no data. There are huge gaps in the availability of relevant data in most cities and nations. Is it possible to study inequality without data?

3. Satterthwaite, David, Alice Sverdlik, and Donald Brown. ʻRevealing and responding to multiple health risks in informal settlements in sub-Saharan African cities.ʼ *Journal of urban health* 96, no. 1 (2019): 112-122.

4. Corburn, Jason, and Alice Sverdlik. ʻUrban Informal Settlement Upgrading and Health Equity.ʼ *In Slum Health*, pp. 80-100. University of California Press, 2016.

5. Revi, Aroma, David Satterthwaite, Fernando Aragón-Durand, Jan Corfee-Morlot, Robert B R Kiunsi, Mark Pelling, Debra Roberts, William Solecki, Sumetee Pahwa Gajjar, Alice Sverdlik, Chapter 8: Urban Areas in Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Cambridge University Press, 2014: 535-612

6. Boonyabancha, Somsook. ʻBaan Mankong: Going to scale with ʻslumʼ and squatter upgrading in Thailand.ʼ *Environment and Urbanization* 17, no. 1 (2005): 21-46; Archer, Diane, and Somsook Boonyabancha. ʻSeeing a disaster as an opportunity–harnessing the energy of disaster survivors for change.ʼ *Environment and Urbanization* 23, no. 2 (2011): 351-364; and Carcellar, Norberto, Jason Christopher Rayos Co, and Zarina O. Hipolito. ʻAddressing disaster risk reduction through community-rooted interventions in the Philippines: Experience of the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines.ʼ *Environment and Urbanization* 23, no. 2 (2011): 365-381.

## ▶ Inequality for whom

Upgrading informal settlements should always be contributing to greater equality in service provision. But as table 1 highlights, there are many different forms of upgrading and they may bring little benefit to residents, and thus contribute little to reducing inequality. While upgrading may not address inequality in basic service provision for all residents – for instance tenants.

Upgrading may bring very modest improvements which are not sustained (e.g., some public taps that are not maintained). Or they are removed; there have been cases where local politicians have provided new water pipes to a settlement before an election and then removed them after the election.

Available literature shows that the greatest driver of inequalities in cities of the Global South is a governance system that does not deliver on most of its responsibilities for infrastructure and services in informal settlements. Upgrading informal settlements

may include securing tenure. It may also transform informal settlement residents' relations with local government agencies/bureaucracies and politicians, and in so doing, advancing the representational dimension of equality. Upgrading can reduce inequalities by including provision of a legal address or other documentation that then allows residents to access basic services (e.g., access to government schools and health care) and get on the voters register. But upgrading schemes are very varied in what they provide and to whom. They may bring very little benefit to residents or even lead to their eviction.[7]

Therefore, not every form of upgrading can be characterised as a commoning practice. **When upgrading is implemented through community-led processes, there are greater opportunities to engage in commoning processes that lead to more substantial equality outcomes.** See Table 1 below on an outline of different forms of upgrading and their potential to address inequalities.

7. See Patel, Sheela. 'Upgrade, rehouse or resettle? An assessment of the Indian government's Basic Services for the Urban Poor (BSUP) programme.' Environment and Urbanization 25, no. 1 (2013): 177-188..

8. Patel 2013

9. Responsibility for maintenance not clear if municipal authority not involved in the upgrading

10. Satterthwaite, David, Diane Archer, Sarah Colenbrander, David Dodman, Jorgelina Hardoy, Diana Mitlin, and Sheela Patel. 'Building resilience to climate change in informal settlements.' One Earth 2, no. 2 (2020): 143-156.

| Forms of upgrading | What in involves | Government engagement with those to be upgraded |
|---|---|---|
| **Upgrading that is actually eviction.** Increases inequality | Pushing residents out of their homes and settlement and rebuilding but with residents not able to access 'upgraded' dwellings[8] | Directed by government, usually implemented by contractors |
| **Rudimentary upgrading.** Very little impact on reducing inequality | Some very basic interventions – e.g., community taps and public toilets | Directed by government, usually implemented by contractors and usually with inadequate maintenance.[9] |
| **More complete upgrading.** Reducing inequalities in living conditions and service provision | Piped water and toilets in each home, electricity, some reblocking, paved access roads, sometimes sewers and drains. Little consultation with residents. | Planned and managed by government agencies and mostly implemented by contractors; often lack of maintenance for infrastructure |
| **Comprehensive upgrading** Reducing inequalities in living conditions and service provision; more government engagement with residents. Provision of tenure; reduced inequality in insecurity and exclusion for those getting tenure. What impacts for tenants? | Legal land title, full range of infrastructure and services (including neighbourhood level such as drainage, street lighting and solid waste collection), support for housebuilding and improvement and for enterprises. Consultation with residents | Strong government commitment to this but planned and managed by government agencies and mostly implemented by contractors. The settlement becomes 'formal' in the sense that it is served by city authorities for policing, street lighting, solid waste collection and other public services |
| **Comprehensive community led upgrading.** Addressing the inequality in who is designing and implementing upgrading as well as upgrading improvements | As above but with community control as exemplified in upgrading programmes supported by CODI and SDI affiliates | Strong government support for community organizations. Co-production for some services |
| **Comprehensive community-led upgrading with resilience lens.** Reducing inequalities in exposure to and capacity to adapt to risk | As above but with greater attention to assessing and anticipating future risk levels, including those from climate change | Strong community-local government partnerships |
| **Transformative upgrading** Greater inter-generational equity | As above with attention to low carbon footprint added | Strong community-local government partnership; support from national government |

Table 1: Informal settlement upgrading and equality in service provision[10]

From Table 1, comprehensive community -led upgrading; comprehensive community-led upgrading with resilience lens and transformative upgrading all have commoning practices at their core.

Various researchers have described the role that commoning practices in upgrading processes play in advancing a series of social and environmental outcomes. For example, grassroots organizations and federations of slum dwellers have helped fight the pandemic and help vulnerable groups in their homes and neighbourhoods. Meanwhile, commoning has been argued to be a productive strategy to build resilience of informal settlement dwellers to climate change impacts.

## 2. Experiences from Latin America, Africa and Asia

In many cities and nations, informal settlement upgrading is no longer controversial. It is seen by many as part of the responsibilities of city government. There are many examples of city governments supporting informal settlement upgrading in Latin America, Africa and Asia. But the policy responses and the funding available usually remain inadequate.

This paper has a particular interest in upgrading programmes that are not just one-off interventions to improve services but that also incorporate commoning practices that are pathways to political inclusion, government-civil society partnerships and co-production.

So it includes an interest in how local and regional governments (LRGs) have engaged with the inhabitants of informal settlements and their organizations and alliances, improving access to basic services. And this contributing to urban equality assessed through access to basic services and through the politics that made this possible. What conditions enabled these initiatives? What key lessons can be drawn. Some of the examples of basic service provision in informal settlements reviewed might not have started as an upgrading project per se, but they present opportunities for building commoning pathways to address urban inequalities.



"Informal settlement of Cockle Bay, Freetown (Sierra Leone) by Alexandre Apsan Frediani

## 2.1 Asia

Experiences from India and Pakistan have been emblematic to demonstrate the role that collective forms of provision of basic services can play to address wider urban inequalities. The Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) has successfully implemented a decentralised sanitation system, which has triggered a series of long-term improvements to the informal settlements in Karachi and other urban centres in Pakistan.[11] The initiative involved the provision of technical and organizational support for residents to build low-cost sanitation infrastructure, such as lane sewers to which household toilets connect. In later stages of the process, this also led to the 'small pipes' built by households and local organizations being connected to trunk sewers provided by the state. This system has spread to most informal settlements in Karachi and various other cities in Pakistan. The OPP experience was really successful in demonstrating that if people continue making their sanitation choices individually, their challenge to access to sanitation infrastructure would not be resolved. Furthermore, it showed that collective action can start addressing sanitation needs, but this also requires collaborative engagement with public authorities. Therefore, OPP has been able to demonstrate that collectively, the small pipes of sanitation systems can be financed and managed locally. But for communities to be successful in managing local services, larger and bulk infrastructure of the city ('big pipes') need to be put in place. This experience also highlighted the importance for community groups to access financial, technical and organisational support to carry out the management functions of basic services.[12]

Another very globally influential experience of community-led service provision in informal settlements is led by the Indian Alliance. The Alliance brought together the national organization/federation of slum dwellers (NSDF), a female collective built around savings groups (Mahila Milan), and a professional but unconventional NGO (the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres—SPARC). Community toilets are among the many fields in which they

are engaged. Together they generated an approach to designing, building and managing community toilets that had in its core the ambition to strengthen collective ties of solidarity and mutual help. McGranahan and Mitlin explain this process in more detail:[13]

"The choice of "communal" toilet blocks matches the collective nature of the problem with a collective response. Ideally, community-based organizations become the local agents of change, helping in the design, choosing the location, and setting the membership fee. SPARC provides technical and legal support, but on the ground, it is networks of Mahila Milan and NSDF that deliver. The focus has been on inner-city settlements where individual dwellings are not large enough for toilets, but the community scale helps the residents combine their individual demands for sanitation improvements (which, being for a public good, are largely ineffectual on the market) into a collective demand for a cleaner and healthier and safer neighbourhood."[14]

These community-led sanitation experiences have also been an effective mechanism to enhance the bargaining power of informal settlement dwellers in their negotiations with public authorities.[15] This increased room for manoeuvre of communities were translated into other achievements, such as increased tenure security, reducing the threat of evictions.

A third important experience of community-led service provision has been developed and supported by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, through their 3-year Asian Coalition for Community Action (ACCA) programme. This initiative focused on supporting and building on models of people-led community development in informal settlements. Therefore, collectively managed basic service provision was approached as part of a wider portfolio of community-led initiatives, aimed to illustrate how upgrading and urban development more widely could happen through people-led processes. ACCA project counted with US$ 11 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which were channelled to fund community groups to undertake small upgrading projects across 165 cities in 19 different Asian countries. A significant and distinct feature of the ACCA programme has been its emphasis on horizontal learning, as it has been able to strengthen city-wide as well as regional networks among informal settlement groups.[16]

11. Hasan, Arif. ''Orangi Pilot Project: the expansion of work beyond Orangi and the mapping of informal settlements and infrastructure.'' *Environment and Urbanization* 18, no. 2 (2006): 451-480.

12. McGranahan, Gordon, and Diana Mitlin. ''Learning from sustained success: how community-driven initiatives to improve urban sanitation can meet the challenges.'' *World Development* 87 (2016): 307-317.

13. McGranahan and Mitlin 2016

14. McGranahan and Mitlin 2016: 312.

15. Burra, Sundar, Sheela Patel, and Thomas Kerr. 'Community-designed, built and managed toilet blocks in Indian cities.' *Environment and Urbanization* 15, no. 2 (2003): 11-32.

16. Boonyabancha, Somsook, and Thomas Kerr. 'Lessons from CODI on co-production.' *Environment and Urbanization* 30, no. 2 (2018): 444-460.

## 2.2 Africa

In the African region there has also been a diverse set of upgrading experiences, which have been centred around the collective and community-led processes of basic services provision.

This proactiveness of grassroots groups in the African region to partner with the state, have led to the development and dissemination of various models of community, state and private sector partnerships. These include for example delegated management model of water delivery in Kenya and Uganda;[17] cooperative and other forms of collective organisations collecting and managing waste in Kisumu;[18] collective forms of providing and managing sanitation infrastructure in Blantyre, Chinhoyi and Kitwe;[19] community-public partnership for water provision in Lilongwe;[20] communally managed off-grid energy and water resources in Dar es Salaam,[21] among others. These examples are long term processes of social mobilisation and incremental change that include the demonstration of the agency of communities in the provision of basic services. These precedents help to address stigma and stereotypes of marginalised groups among policy-makers and build more productive pathways of collaboration and partnership building. Wamuchiru documents these connections between community-led water infrastructure provision in Chamazi settlement in Dar es Salaam as part of a wider pathway to upgrade informal settlements, while increasing the recognition of informal settlement dwellers in urban decision-making processes.[22]

The change in policy caused by social mobilisation is particularly notable in South Africa where the government has made a strong commitment to stop building houses for low-income-groups in poorly located land and to shift more support to upgrading informal settlements provided that they are in areas close to jobs.[23] The government has also made a strong commitment to community-led practices for upgrading. But it has proved difficult to translate these commitments into practice on the ground.[24] A 2018 report noted that in the previous five years, the number of low-income households accessing serviced sites or becoming part of in-situ upgrading projects has increased from 20% of those receiving assistance to 45%.[25]

Meanwhile, in North Africa there has been upgrading experiences with strong leadership and involvement of government authorities. The Tunisian Government is not noted for its support of local government in housing, although its support for upgrading goes back to the 1970s. A 2018 Report described how the Agency for Rehabilitation and Urban Renewal is implementing a programme for the rehabilitation of housing and provision of basic infrastructure, utilities and public spaces in 146 irregular settlements in 99 communes. Each local plan will include the up-front identification of inhabitants' needs, expectations and priorities. Discussions were also held with municipal officials to ensure that they would buy into the needs and priorities that were identified.[26]

The government of Morocco proposed the relocation of around 5,000 households in the city of Rabat as part of its City Development Plan. But local slum associations and elected representatives (including mayors and councillors from various neighbourhoods) lobbied against this. Given the strong advocacy of the communities and elected officials for in-situ upgrading, the Wali of Rabat halted plans for the relocation.[27]

These examples vary as to which of the seven categories in Table 1 best describes what they do but most involve local government in a positive role and civil society working with them.

But it is worth making a distinction between government-led comprehensive upgrading and comprehensive community-led upgrading. In the first of these, community organizations and other civil society groups may be actively engaged with the upgrading and the local government but they are not initiating it or leading it. Comprehensive community-led upgrading also seeks to fully engage local government and get their active support but it is community led. This is exemplified by the many upgrading programmes developed by slum/shack dweller federations that are affiliates of Slum/Shack Dwellers International.

17. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0957178717300048 Klaas Schwartz, Mireia Tutusaus, Elisa Savelli, Water for the urban poor: Balancing financial and social objectives through service differentiation in the Kenyan water sector, *Utilities Policy*, Volume 48, 2017,Pages 22-31,

18. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0956247815623772 Gutberlet, Jutta, Jaan-Henrik Kain, Belinda Nyakinya, Dickens H. Ochieng, Nicholas Odhiambo, Michael Oloko, John Omolo et al. 'Socio-environmental entrepreneurship and the provision of critical services in informal settlements.' *Environment and Urbanization* 28, no. 1 (2016): 205-222.

19. McGranahan and Mitlin 2016.

20. Banana, Evans, Patrick Chikoti, Chisomo Harawa, Gordon McGranahan, Diana Mitlin, Stella Stephen, Noah Schermbrucker, Farirai Shumba, and Anna Walnycki. 'Sharing reflections on inclusive sanitation.' *Environment and Urbanization* 27, no. 1 (2015): 19-34

21. Wamuchiru, Elizabeth. 'Beyond the networked city: situated practices of citizenship and grassroots agency in water infrastructure provision in the Chamazi settlement, Dar es Salaam.' *Environment and Urbanization* 29, no. 2 (2017): 551-566.

22. Wamuchiru 2017

23. South African SDI Alliance. *Masikhase: Community Upgrading Finance Facility*, Cape Town: SDI, 2013

24. South African SDI Alliance 2013; Fieuw, Walter, and Diana Mitlin. 'What the experiences of South Africa's mass housing programme teach us about the contribution of civil society to policy and programme reform.' *Environment and Urbanization* 30, no. 1 (2018): 215-23; Fieuw, W., and Y. Hendler. 'Exploring Partnerships with Local Governments; A People's Led Approach to Informal Settlement Upgrading.' (2017).

25. Gardner, David and Olivier Toutain. Gold V Africa Report on Housing (second draft), Centre for Affordable Housing Finance in Africa (CAHF). 2018

26. Gardner and Toutain 2018

27. Gardner and Toutain 2018

## 2.3 Latin America

In Latin America, government support for upgrading informal settlements is now a key part of housing policies in many cities and nations in Latin America.[28] But reading the descriptions of these informal settlement upgrading practices, many stress the importance of community organizations and many include participatory budgeting.[29] But once decisions have been made about upgradings including collective decisions, they are mostly implemented by city governments and often with financial support from central governments. Many national and subnational government organizations have also developed credit programmes for housing improvement, most of which have included providing technical assistance; these can complement upgrading programmes. A good example of one of these upgrading initiatives is the favela urbanization programmes funded by the Brazilian national government under *the Plan of Growth Acceleration* (*Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento, PAC*), from 2007 until 2014. This initiative planned to invest R$ 33 Billion of Reais (equivalent to 6.3 billion USD) and it was the biggest programme of informal settlement upgrading in Brazilian history. While generating extremely important physical improvements to areas in need of infrastructure investments throughout many Brazilian cities, PAC projects have often been criticised for the lack of meaningful participation of local communities in the planning, implementation and monitoring of its activities.[30]

At the same time, across the region there have been several grassroots initiatives focused on setting precedents of more collective form of service provision in informal settlements. Habitat International Coalition members have been promoting and documenting these experiences, understanding them as part of the social production of habitat. These include for example cooperative initiatives in Uruguay led by FUCVAM, incremental women-led water and sanitation improvements promoted by Red Habitat in Bolivia, or collective self-management systems in São Paulo part of wider activities of the housing social movement.[31] Apart from illustrating new forms of service



Brasil Streets
(Source: Denniz Futalan - Pexels.com)

provision, these experiences have helped to re-orient housing and urban development policies, contributing to the development of legal, financial and administrative instruments that can support more collective and community-led forms of upgrading'.[32]

**A key motivation underlying many of these experiences from Latin America is to connect collective forms of service provision with wider struggles to recognise, protect and fulfil human rights.** These collective experiences of providing services in informal settlements are often part of wider struggles for the right to the city, calling for more democratic processes of managing territories. They are approached as a mechanism to denounce violations of human rights reproduced by inadequate or lack of state actions in this field, demanding a more active and supportive role of government authorities.

28. Sette Whitaker Ferreira, João, Eduardo Rojas, Higor Rafael De Souza Carvalho, Carolina Rago Frignani, and Ligia Santi Lupo. 'Housing policies and the roles of local governments in Latin America: recent experiences.' *Environment and Urbanization* 32, no. 2 (2020): 333-350.

29. Cabannes, Yves. 'The impact of participatory budgeting on basic services: municipal practices and evidence from the field.' *Environment and Urbanization* 27, no. 1 (2015): 257-284

30. Cardoso, Adauto Lúcio, and Rosana Denaldi. Urbanização de favelas no Brasil: um balanço preliminar do PAC. Rio de Janeiro: Letra Capital, 2018

31. Coalición Internacional para el Hábitat. *Utopías en construcción*; Experiencias latinoamericanas de producción social del habitat, 2018.
https://hic-al.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Libro-utopias-digital.pdf

32. Zárate, Lorena. 'They are not 'informal settlements'–They are habitats made by the people.' *The Nature of Cities* 26 (2016) https://www.thenatureofcities.com/2016/04/26/they-are-not-informal-settlements-they-are-habitats-made-by-people/

# 3. Lessons learned for upgrading as commoning:

Drawing on the experiences outlined in the previous section, six key lessons can be outlined from collective approaches to service provision in informal settlements towards the promotion of commoning pathways to urban equality. These lessons are particularly targeting the role of LRGs in creating the conditions to advance transformative upgrading practices.

## 3.1 Political empowerment

It is *common* to look at experiences with upgrading informal settlements and see them as positive and pro-poor ways of getting infrastructure and services to their residents. They usually get evaluated on the quality and scale of provision for basic services. But another way of looking at them is the positive political changes that they catalysed or enhanced. These include positive changes in partnerships between local government agencies and civil society including the residents of informal settlements that build a capacity to continue to work together to improve or expand upgrading. It should contribute to overcoming the problem of upgrading projects that deteriorate becauseLRGs do not see this as their responsibility. So the interest is in **upgrading as a catalyst for political change that reduces inequalities in voice, participation, engagement and governance – and basic service provision.** And that engages all relevant local government departments; there is not much point developing upgrading programmes if the government agency responsible for roads and highways is intent on bulldozing them (see Table 1). And in much of Latin America, it was political changes (return to democracy, new constitutions, elected mayors and city government..) that catalysed upgrading/extension of basic services.

The federations of the urban poor members of Slum Dwellers International have been at the forefront of demonstrating more collaborative and co-produced ways of providing services in informal settlements. These experiences have generated a range of tools and methods that informal settlement dwellers use to undertake projects and negotiate. Instead of the conventional focus on protest, federations' strategy is to offer local government federation capacities and partnerships and show LRGs what federations can do. Certain key principles underpin federation strategies: be organized (much easier for developing community-local government partnerships); be well prepared for meetings with local governments and bring the data needed for upgrading or other initiatives; and offer them support, including the capacity to undertake community-led enumerations and mapping.[33] In this sense, federations have been committed to advance community-led practices and to working well with local governments.

Box 1 has a description of a community led upgrading scheme that encouraged the community organizations and the local government to expand the scale of their programme and have a city-wide focus. As the Asian Coalition for Community action showed, even if the resources are not available for upgrading all informal settlements now, it is important to bring their residents and community organizations into discussions of city-wide action so they are not excluded.

33. Patel, Sheela, Carrie Baptist, and Celine d'Cruz. 'Knowledge is power–informal communities assert their right to the city through SDI and community-led enumerations.' *Environment and Urbanization* 24, no. 1 (2012): 13-26.

## BOX 1: Community-led upgrading and going to scale in Bhuj, India[34]

In Bhuj, a city of 200,000 inhabitants, a community-led on-site redevelopment of three long established 'slum' communities rebuilt 314 houses. All three communities were built with a new layout, new houses and new infrastructure. The site had to be reblocked and every household got a 65 square metre plot. It took a lot of discussion and negotiation, as some households got smaller plots than they had previously had.

But this initiative was part of a more ambitious programme to reach all slums, working with city government and civil society. It followed a pattern that has since then become more common.

First, there is a federation of women's self-help savings groups called Sakhi Sangini active in most of the city's 76 slums. Second, there are local NGOs that support them. Third, there is a supportive city government that can access central government funding and use it to support community driven development, rather than contractor driven development. Fourth, the Federation knew the power of community-generated data. In 2010, the Federation carried out the first city-wide survey of slums with support of their partner NGO Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS). They set up committees in many informal settlement clusters to discuss their problems and review the survey.

A range of projects were implemented in close collaboration with the municipal government and with technical support from NGOs like Hunnarshala. These projects gradually expanded into a more comprehensive, collaborative program of city-wide and people-driven upgrading. Called Homes in the City, these encompassed housing, sanitation, water supply, solid waste management and livelihood improvement. They also paid attention to the need for earthquake-proof housing (in 2001, 7,000 people died and thousands were left homeless by an earthquake) and designs, materials and layouts that kept temperatures down during times of extreme heat. The Federation formed a housing committee and worked with architects at Hunnarshala to develop inexpensive earthquake-resistant house designs people could build themselves. Support from ACHR's ACCA programme as seed capital set up a revolving loan fund for housing. 120 vulnerable families living in different slum communities were able to upgrade or rebuild their houses, through their savings groups with low interest loans from the fund and technical assistance from Hunnarshala.

**The implication for LRGs is that it is crucial to have a city-scale approach to upgrading processes.** This means addressing city-wide social and spatial dynamics that affect the wellbeing of those living in informal settlements.

But also, and most crucially, **it means creating opportunities for informal settlement dwellers to be represented and participate meaningfully in city-wide decision-making processes.**

## 3.2 Flexible and continuously available finance

Many of the initiatives reviewed in previous sections were supported by flexible finance opportunities that met communities' administrative and organisational needs and capacities. That means, recognising savings, providing liquidity and resources without complex and exclusionary bureaucratic procedures.[35] That means creating the opportunity for funds to organized communities as and when they need it. These experiences also highlighted the need for funds not to operate as a one-off initiative for specific settlements with timelines set by funders. These procedures often increase intra informal settlement inequality, not meeting the timelines of communities and cities where they live.

The power and role of community-led service provision has often been nurtured through funds from international cooperation. Apart from the ACCA project, funded by Bill and Belinda Gates Foundation, the UK government's Community-led Infrastructure Finance Facility (CLIFF) was another important example where international collaborations have been useful to increase communities' access to finance. In the early 2000s, the CLIFF programme was being implemented by the NGO Homeless International who provided bridge finance and venture capital for community-led housing and infrastructure initiatives across African and Asian cities. These experiences have not been able to create local, as well as global, inclusive and

34. Asian Coalition for Housing Rights), '314 Houses in Bhuj' Case Studies of Collective Housing in Asian Cities Series, 2021. http://www.achr.net/download.php?ic=16

35. Siddharth Agarwal, Kanupriya Kothiwal and Shabnam Verma. *From risks to resilience: action research into informal workers' health and wellbeing in Indore, India*. London: IIED, 2022. https://www.iied.org/21151iied

sustainable financial systems, targeting informal settlement upgrading. If anything, the current scenario is one that communities have less access to finance opportunities that supports and enables community-led processes than before.

In this context, it is crucial that LRGs can demonstrate and promote financial systems and models that support community-led processes of providing services in informal settlements.

This means working through blended financial systems, drawing on households', communities', as well as cities' funds (which can be in the form of state-owned assets, such as land). And crucially, calling LRGs to create mechanisms to keep costs down for communities, through subsidies and other forms of incentives and regulations.

## 3.3 Commoning institutions and tools

Perhaps the most interesting institutions that could be said to support commoning through upgrading are two funds set up for funding community interests. One is Akiba Mashinani Trust (AMT) that provides funding and financial services to support the Kenyan Homeless People's Federation (Muungano wa Wanavijiji).[36] Muungano is a federation of autonomous savings groups with over 60,000 members from informal settlements across Kenya. AMT is able to use these savings as seed capital for revolving funds at the community, city and national scales. The funds offer informal settlers a range of financial products, including community project loans to finance social housing, sanitation and basic infrastructure. AMT is also supporting Muungano in developing and getting consensus for upgrading a very large-scale informal settlement, Mukuru, supported by the local government.[37]

The other is CODI in Thailand, that funds and supports hundreds of community organizations to develop and manage their upgrading plans – or alternative housing if this is not possible.[38]

Many of the 32 slum/shack dweller federations that are SDI affiliates have also developed their own federation. wide funds. In these funds and with CODI and AMT, the use of such funding is determined by and accountable to the organized communities, not only the external funder (which is usually the case).

These funds are examples of what might be considered commoning institutions in that they have a community-managed resource pool and a frame of regulation, governance and equity enacted by that community around those common resources. But they are also supporting engagement with local governments on basic service provision.

In regard to improving and extending basic service provision in informal settlements, various community and community-government practises have been developed, including community-led mapping and enumeration of informal settlements (among the suite of practises used by SDI members) and co-production of services – noting here that co-production in urban areas involves the co-delivery of basic municipal services, with roles for both government and organized citizens.[39] The actual delivery of services as almost ancillary to the relationship implications of the co-production process. From considering co-production as a means to meet essential ends to co-production as a means of altering essential relationships and ongoing practices.[40]

Co-production's intention from the outset is to improve the relationships and work with local government and other public service providers. This is also the case for community-led mapping/enumerations. By contrast, commoning's focus is alternative practices in response to government inadequacies or failures. Perhaps the key lesson coming from these experiences is that **informal settlement dwellers may use commoning tools or practices but seeking to hold local governments to account while also seeking for partnerships with them.**

36. Weru, Jane, Omondi Okoyo, Mary Wambui, Patrick Njoroge, Jacinta Mwelu, Evans Otibine, Ann Chepchumba, Regina Wanjiku, Tabitha Wakesho, and John Pius Njenga Maina. 'The Akiba Mashinani Trust, Kenya: a local fund's role in urban development.' *Environment and Urbanization* 30, no. 1 (2018): 53-66

37. City Briefing. *Achieving Scale, Social Inclusion, and Multifaceted Shelter Solutions Lessons from the Special Planning Area (SPA) in Mukuru*, Nairobi: (2020) https://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/10884IIED.pdf

38. Boonyabancha, Somsook, and Thomas Kerr. 'Lessons from CODI on co-production.' *Environment and Urbanization* 30, no. 2 (2018): 444-460.

39. Mitlin, Diana, and Sheridan Bartlett. 'Co-production–key ideas.' *Environment and Urbanization* 30, no. 2 (2018): 355-366.

40. Mitlin and Bartlett (2018)

## 3.4 Addressing diverse needs and aspirations

Comprehensive upgrading includes provision of infrastructure and services that meet many of the Sustainable Development Goals and so contributes much to 'leaving no-one behind'. Community-led approaches to provide basic services in informal settlements can reduce poverty as well as inequalities in access to infrastructure and services in comparison to other areas of the city. However, if the conditions are not in place for communities to engage equitably in this process, there is a risk that such processes can deepen inequalities within and among informal settlements. Upgrading with universal service provision means equality in what is provided to each household. Upgrading also reduces inequality in housing infrastructure and services in comparison to other (formal) settlements.

A great sensitivity is needed on the question of cost. Households will welcome their inclusion in electricity, regular piped water provision and other public services as long as they can be afforded. This can be addressed by having lower standards in upgrading – but this maintains inequalities within city populations.

Current upgrading practices have often failed to ensure that they serve all groups and their particular needs (e.g., by age, gender, sex, class, health status, ethnic group, nationality,…).[41] This seems difficult for professionals to do in the needed depth and detail. But community-led processes (such as mapping, enumeration as well as dialogue) have shown their capacity to develop upgrading programmes that include voice and engagement for these different groups. So upgrading programmes need engagement with informal settlement populations and their organizations to identify what needs to be done and by whom to achieve this. But given that internal community dynamics can also be exclusionary, it is crucial that local government authorities and other development actors can provide support and conditions for community-led processes to approach these asymmetries of power constructively. This requires support to groups that are less recognised and less mobilised, as well as promotion of conditions for community groups to engage with social diversity.

**One important way to enable governments to provide support to people in all of their diversity is for upgrading initiatives to include provision of a formal address or other documentation to each person or household that allows them to access public services and often to open bank accounts and get insurance.**

## 3.5 Appropriate standards and regulations

The process of planning, implementing and maintaining the infrastructure and services that upgrading involves is as important for good basic service provision as what is built. Upgrading can reduce or remove many inequalities in service provision between informal and formal settlements – for instance, for water, getting safe, reliable piped supplies to each dwelling. But upgrading programmes may be providing much less than this – e.g., communal taps – while those in formal housing get safe regular piped supplies to their homes.

Upgrading may be providing support for upgrading to standards lower than

official regulations – for instance in plot sizes and quality of provision for water. This could be seen as widening inequality – indeed cementing inequality into the processes that build and shape cities. But the example of the upgrading programme in Gobabis and other initiatives in Namibia by the Namibia Homeless Peoples Federation show how the reduction in standards they negotiated reduced many aspects of inequality, including the cost of a serviced house plot.[42] But perhaps most importantly also in the relationships between local government and the residents of an informal settlement and their organizations. Official regulations on minimum plot sizes

41. Rigon, Andrea. 'Diversity, justice and slum upgrading: An intersectional approach to urban development.' *Habitat International* 130 (2022): 102691.

42. Delgado, Guillermo, Anna Muller, Royal Mabakeng, and Martin Namupala. 'Co-producing land for housing through informal settlement upgrading: Lessons from a Namibian municipality.' *Environment and Urbanization* 32, no. 1 (2020): 175-194.

were also unnecessarily large (and thus expensive). But some upgrading and new building schemes use lower standards to increase equality. This raises a key question around what aspects of inequality does upgrading address. To respond to such a dilemma, it is key to foster public deliberations around the pragmatism needed to make the most of what is possible.

This is a reminder that many upgrading schemes lack the funding to be able to provide houses to official standards. But community-led upgrading makes scarce resources go further and can build the positive relationships with local government agencies that continues to support and where possible add to the upgrading.

## 3.6 Scaling out, up, across and down

Upgrading has been often conceived as a localised territorial intervention, tending to risk addressing only the manifestations of urban challenges, rather than their core dynamics. Therefore, designing upgrading interventions that address the issue of scale is critical if it is to impact on the drivers of urban inequalities. Drawing on a typology around scaling citizen participation in planning, scaling upgrading from a commoning perspective can be approached in four different ways.[43] The first strategy of scaling upgrading is by replicating community-led upgrading strategies from one settlement to another, with the objective to 'scale out' community-led models of service delivery and, in this way, achieve city-wide impact through increased spatial coverage. Secondly, scaling upgrading can take place by enabling the design of policies and governance arrangements that create better conditions for community-led upgrading to be implemented. Thirdly, scaling across is about drawing on the lessons learned from community-led upgrading and transferring it to democratise the management of key city-wide resources. And finally, scaling down is about approaching community-led upgrading as a means to change mind-sets and a general culture of governance, where the state is viewed as a guarantor to the conditions for collective forms of managing urban goods and services. Scaling upgrading has been mostly approached as a way to scale up and out, and there have been more limited experiences of scaling through and down, which tend to have more long-term and deeper impact on urban governance systems.

A key mechanism of advancing scaling strategies is learning how this was done in other cities. In Namibia, the Namibian Housing Action Group (NHAG) officials and Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN) representatives visited South Africa to see how the South African Federation managed reblocking and incremental services improvement;  the virtues of self-enumeration; upgrading through a partnership approach; and the value of written agreements between local authorities and inhabitants. "Arguably, this experience changed the way Gobabis Municipality liaised with inhabitants in local informal settlements. The municipality proposed a similar reblocking approach, which led to upgrading instead of relocation, and paved the way to the development of a partnership for upgrading in Freedom Square."[44]

43. Mitlin, Diana. 'Citizen participation in planning: from the neighbourhood to the city.' *Environment and Urbanization* 33, no. 2 (2021): 295-309.

44. Delgado, Mulle, Mabakeng and Namupala 2020: 181

Namibia Housing Action Group (NHAG) and the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN) (https://twinhillstrust.org)

# 4. Conclusions

This paper argues that for informal settlement upgrading to build pathways for urban equality, it needs to be community-led. Non-speculative and collective forms of planning, designing, implementing, managing and monitoring the incremental improvements of basic services in informal settlements can be an important entry point to promote commoning pathways for urban equality. We make a distinction in this paper between government-led comprehensive upgrading and comprehensive community-led upgrading. In the first of these, community organizations and other civil society groups may be actively engaged with the upgrading and the local government but they are not initiating it or leading it.

Comprehensive community-led upgrading puts the emphasis on community ownership and agency, in ways that promotes collective forms of managing services and goods in the city, while also strengthening communities' political capabilities to influence decision making processes. As argued in the paper, for comprehensive community-led upgrading to build pathways for urban equality, it needs to address issues of social diversity, tackling

power asymmetries within and across settlements in the city. At the same time, it has to pay greater attention to assessing and anticipating future risk levels, including those from climate change.

Comprehensive community-led upgrading should not be associated with the role-back of the responsibilities of the state, quite the opposite. Governments, and particularly local governments, have a fundamental role in guaranteeing the necessary conditions for community structures to be able to perform these roles, without the uneven and unfair distribution of risks and responsibilities. The commoning practices used by grassroots organisations and federations in informal settlements demonstrate to local governments that through equitable principles and practices of subsidiarity and with the right support in place, they can take a lead in upgrading processes at scale. We argue in this paper that by increasing these collective capabilities to upgrade informal settlements, local governments can respond to the uneven distribution of services and infrastructure in the city, while also building the conditions for a more radically democratic form of urban governance.

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