

Help build cities that work for people and planet

The challenges

As the world becomes more urbanised, the demographics of urbanisation remain poorly understood but will become increasingly important. There is a need for better data on population distribution and movement, and to understand more clearly how these present opportunities as well as increasing vulnerabilities and inequalities.

The urbanisation of poverty requires better ways to assess and accurately measure its nature and scale. A gendered perspective is important to grasp and address the interplay between income and non-income dimensions of urban poverty, including lack of voice and representation.

The reduction of urban poverty and inequalities requires inclusive urban governance systems. Our experience shows that this is more likely to happen when local governments, civil society organisations and private sector actors are actively engaged in negotiation over local priorities and have access to locally relevant and accurate information.

In an urban world, achieving socially and environmentally beneficial urbanisation will be even more crucial for sustainable development at the local, regional and global levels. Key issues include how urbanisation interacts with the use of natural resources, especially food security and consumption; how rapid urbanisation may result in land contestation and exclusionary dynamics within and around urban centres; and how local and national strategies for climate change adaptation and mitigation actively integrate urban development and urban poverty reduction.

Our work areas

The development outcomes we want to achieve are closely linked to our theory of change and ways of working. They fall into two main categories of work whose activities reinforce each other.

1. Working with local researchers, activists or practitioners contributing to environmental and development objectives in their local area. This will include:

- Support to locally driven processes, and in particular those led by organisations of the urban poor, by engaging with their own learning practices and building their reputations.
- Working with local partners in applied research to understand problems and demonstrate how change can happen.
- Providing locally relevant publications and sponsoring local meetings and exchanges focusing on developing a better understanding of the settlement or city's (or country's urban and rural-urban) challenges, and how to overcome them.

2. Contributing to academic research and teaching that is helping to form the local and international practitioners, activists and researchers of the future.

- Helping local professionals to be familiar with key ideas. This makes a considerable difference to the ease with which these ideas are accepted in local political contexts and influence the formulation of supportive national policies and programmes which at least in some circumstances can play an important role.
- Engaging with international urban networks seeking to support a range of local agencies working for more equitable and inclusive urban development (present and future)
- Engaging in international debates on urbanisation and its social and environmental dimensions particularly through written materials
- Advising international actors and agencies currently or potentially involved in efforts to support more equitable and environmentally sound urban development.

Over five years

We will aim to:

- Demonstrate ways in which socially inclusive and environmentally beneficial urbanisation can be achieved — this will include work on density and land and work on rural-urban linkages in Africa and Asia, and work on the interactions between exclusion, age and gender
- Ensure that urban poverty and inequality are integrated into the post-2015 development agenda — this will include mainly international/global work, but informed by work with organisations of the urban poor
- Demonstrate the potential for the coproduction of basic services and more pro-poor politics that includes the views, assessments and priorities of urban poor groups with regard to deprivation and inequality — this will include ongoing work with urban poor federations in Africa and Asia, and work on food security in African and Asian cities
- Enhance urban resilience to climate change through improved knowledge, capacity and funding that take into account low-income groups — this will include work in Asia as part of the Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network, in Africa, and international/global work

Partners. We expect our collaboration with federations of urban poor groups, especially SDI and the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights to continue. We will also nurture collaborations between our civil society and local academic partners, with a view to expanding networks and support learning. We will also continue to work with international agencies such as UN Habitat, UNFPA, UNEP and United Cities and Local Governments, as well as with international consortiums of researchers and practitioners,

Links to change initiatives. Our work contributes to all change initiatives. The ‘Rights plus action’ initiative is closely linked to our work supporting organisations of the urban poor in securing access to basic services. Our work on building resilience to climate change that takes into account the needs and priorities of low-income urban groups contributes to the Inclusive transitions to climate resilience and green economy initiative. Our work on urbanisation and rural-urban linkages, and on urban food security makes a substantive contribution to the ‘Fair consumption from sustainable food systems’ initiative. Finally, the ‘International engagement for a sustainable planet’ initiative benefits from our experience on the importance of involving local governments and municipalities in this debate.