

# Cities that work for people and the planet

Reducing risk and promoting inclusive and sustainable  
transformation for all urban residents



# In brief

IIED has worked on urban environmental and poverty issues since the 1970s, aiming to support more equitable and sustainable development in urban centres in low- and middle-income countries. Our poverty focus is vital and informs everything we do because people on very low incomes, living in slums or squatter settlements, are the most vulnerable to environmental challenges. Our work has always been developed with partners, ensuring that it is rooted in the concerns of urban residents and practitioners, while contributing significantly to global research and policy debates.

## A strategy fit for the future

We know the lowest-income nations will experience rapid urban growth over the coming decades. Increases in birth rates over death rates and the arrival of men, women and children through migration will swell the cities of Africa and Asia. Climate change and conflict will play their part in shaping patterns of mass movement. But these nations often lack the institutions and infrastructure necessary to counter the poverty, social exclusion and unhealthy environments that too often accompany dense, spiralling populations.

The Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement cannot be achieved without inclusive and resilient towns and cities. Our work to support healthier, more secure urban futures will deliver on many fronts: we will highlight the needs and priorities identified by low-income urban groups; we will build recognition of the social and environmental interdependencies between urban centres, rural areas and the global environment. And we will emphasise the importance of local governments and grassroots organisations in setting priorities, making decisions and implementing solutions.



# Priorities for action

IIED will work with local populations and institutions to create urban futures that work for people and planet. Most urban growth will take place in areas where planning and governance capacity is weak. Working with partners at local, national and global levels, we will promote policies that deliver urban growth that is low-carbon, healthy, resilient, prosperous and which leaves no one behind. To support the realisation of sound policy, we will make the case for increasing resources and strengthening local capacity for effective implementation.

We will continue our longstanding work in informal settlements in urban areas of Africa, Asia and Latin America, while widening the scope of our research to include refugees and other displaced people. We will highlight the challenges experienced by all residents of these marginalised areas in accessing housing, basic services and decent work, and will support their collective efforts to engage with local authorities in the search for sustainable solutions.

## Our thematic areas

Inclusion, gender and disability are themes that cut across all our work, underpinning a commitment to 'leave no one behind'.

### Urbanisation and rural-urban links

Understanding urbanisation and the links between urban and rural areas is fundamental for policies and initiatives aiming to reduce poverty and protect the environment. Our work has challenged the many myths around urbanisation and has attracted attention to the all-too-often overlooked demographic importance and socio-economic role of smaller urban centres.

**[www.iied.org/urbanisation-rural-urban-linkages](http://www.iied.org/urbanisation-rural-urban-linkages)**

### Water, sanitation and shelter

We support and document community-led shelter and infrastructure upgrading processes in informal settlements around the world, emphasising the importance of co-production between local residents and authorities to meet shelter and basic services needs, such as water and sanitation.

### Urban risk and urban crises responses

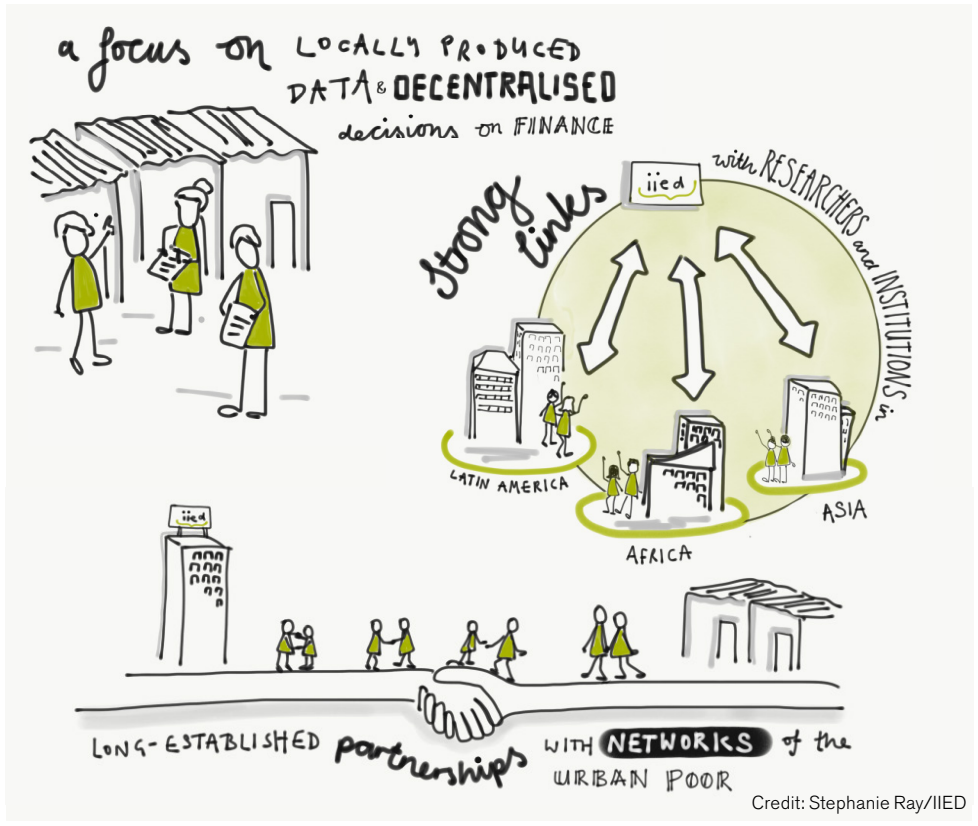
Urban populations are increasingly facing both acute and chronic crises, arising from climate change, natural disasters and man-made conflicts. Our work has investigated what makes urban populations vulnerable. We have worked with civil society and local governments to develop their capacities to assess vulnerability and implement measures to build resilience and reduce disaster risk. More recently, we have worked with the humanitarian community to understand how local people, civil society organisations and international humanitarian agencies can more effectively engage in crises responses.

**[www.iied.org/urban-risk-urban-crises-responses](http://www.iied.org/urban-risk-urban-crises-responses)**

### Food and nutrition

We seek to bolster the food security, living conditions and resilience of low-income communities. Recently, we have analysed urban refugees' health in East Africa, food access and consumption in South Asia, and health risks in African informal settlements.

# Local action, global partnerships



## Recent achievements

- We have secured funding for a three-year, four-country study that will strengthen understanding of how donors and local governments can support the wellbeing and self-reliance of refugees in urban areas
- We have documented access to shelter for vulnerable groups in three cities of East Africa, producing a variety of working papers and policy briefings that are informing city-level policy discussions on affordable housing solutions for low-income groups
- We are partnering with grassroots organisations in India and Zimbabwe to analyse how to address informal workers' occupational health, public health and climate-related risks
- In partnership with urban poor communities in Nepal and Cambodia, we have produced new evidence of how income and non-income deprivations affect food and nutrition security in low-income urban settlements, and the multiple strategies that poor women develop to put food on the table
- We worked with partners to highlight our work on urban shelter and climate resilience at the World Urban Forum, participating in high-level panels and influential side events
- In 2019, *Environment & Urbanization* (E&U) had approximately 398,000 full text downloads. E&U now ranks number seven out of the 40 most established urban studies journals.

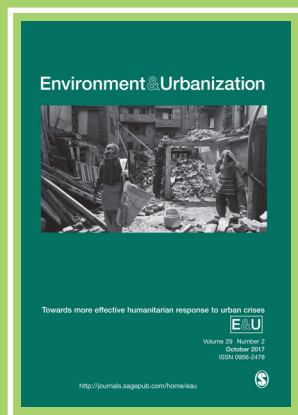
# Environment and Urbanization journal

*Environment and Urbanization* (E&U) is our world-leading environmental and urban studies journal. One of the most widely read and broadly distributed journals in its field, E&U provides local researchers, NGO staff and professionals working in in Africa, Asia and Latin America with the chance to write about their work, present their ideas and debate key issues.

[www.environmentandurbanization.org](http://www.environmentandurbanization.org)

[www.facebook.com/EnvironmentandUrbanization](https://www.facebook.com/EnvironmentandUrbanization)

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## Further ambitions

Through our own research and in partnership with academic institutions, government agencies and civil society, we aim to contribute to policy and practice by:

- Emphasising the role of local funds in supporting a range of local poverty-reducing initiatives, leveraging other resources and helping to build partnerships with local governments
- Encouraging organised urban poor groups and federations to work with government to co-produce much-needed improvements in services
- Highlight the central role of the informal settlement profiles, enumerations and mapping by slum/shack dweller federations in reducing urban poverty and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals
- Encouraging greater attention to public health and environmental health concerns in low-income settlements among urban specialists, governments and international agencies
- Strengthening urban actors' capacities to reduce risks via partnerships, local and global advocacy and high-quality research; identify good practices and financing strategies for risk-reduction, including local access to finance
- Exploring emerging opportunities to work on issues of displacement and the possibilities of applying lessons and approaches from our work with community organisations to foster resilient and inclusive urban development in a variety of urban crisis contexts
- Expanding our commitment to gender transformation by analysing housing, land tenure, safety in public spaces and informal livelihoods that can promote gender-sensitive, inclusive urban policies and initiatives
- Supporting local partners to identify how sanitation and water services can be improved in urban settlements where conventional piped water and sewer services do not reach
- Contributing to the growing interest in food consumption by documenting how food insecurity and inadequate nutrition are linked to income and non-income dimensions of urban poverty.



# Get in touch

**We are keen to hear about new ideas and research from others. Get in touch with us to share what you know and find out more.**

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IIED applies original thinking to sustainable development issues, linking local priorities to global challenges. We work with marginalised people around the world to amplify their influence.

## Join the debate

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## Institutional Materials

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### Urban

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#### *Keywords:*

Urban crises, risk, poverty, resilience, migration, informal settlements (slums)

#### Photo credits:

Cover: Balloon mapping of food safety threats in Mathare, an informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya. Credit: Sohail Ahmed

Page 2: Members of the Zambia Homeless and Poor People's Federation laying out plots for housing in Choma, Zambia. Credit: Diana Mitlin/IIED