

Cities that work for people and the planet

Promoting urban transformations that are inclusive and sustainable for all 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

Although urban areas are receiving greater attention from policymakers, funders and the media, few initiatives seek to ensure that actions are inclusive and respond to the needs and priorities of low-income residents. This poses a challenge for us: how can we continue to work on the vitally important issues of urban poverty, inclusivity and sustainability in a way that engages and influences the new actors entering the urban space?

Over the next two years and beyond, we will promote urban development pathways that can generate benefits for all residents, using a three-pronged approach. First, we will stress the needs and priorities identified by low-income urban groups. Second, we will build recognition of the social and environmental inter-dependencies and relationships between urban centres, rural areas and the global environment. Third, we will emphasise the importance of decision making and priority setting by local organisations and local governments.



Research areas

We focus on two core issues and a number of thematic, interlinking areas.

A focus on urban poverty

For over 20 years, IIED has worked with partners in the global South to widen knowledge and debate on the scale and nature of urban poverty. We will continue to build an evidence base that challenges conventional definitions and measurements of urban poverty. And we will support the documentation of successful urban poverty reduction initiatives.

www.iied.org/urban-poverty

A focus on the urban environment

Our work has strong environmental components, either related to environmental health (for low-income groups or those living in informal settlements) or resource use and pollution control. Much of our work with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is around the environmental risks that climate change is bringing or will bring, and how to build the resilience of men, women and children at risk. Work is also underway on how to combine good development with low-carbon cities.

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

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

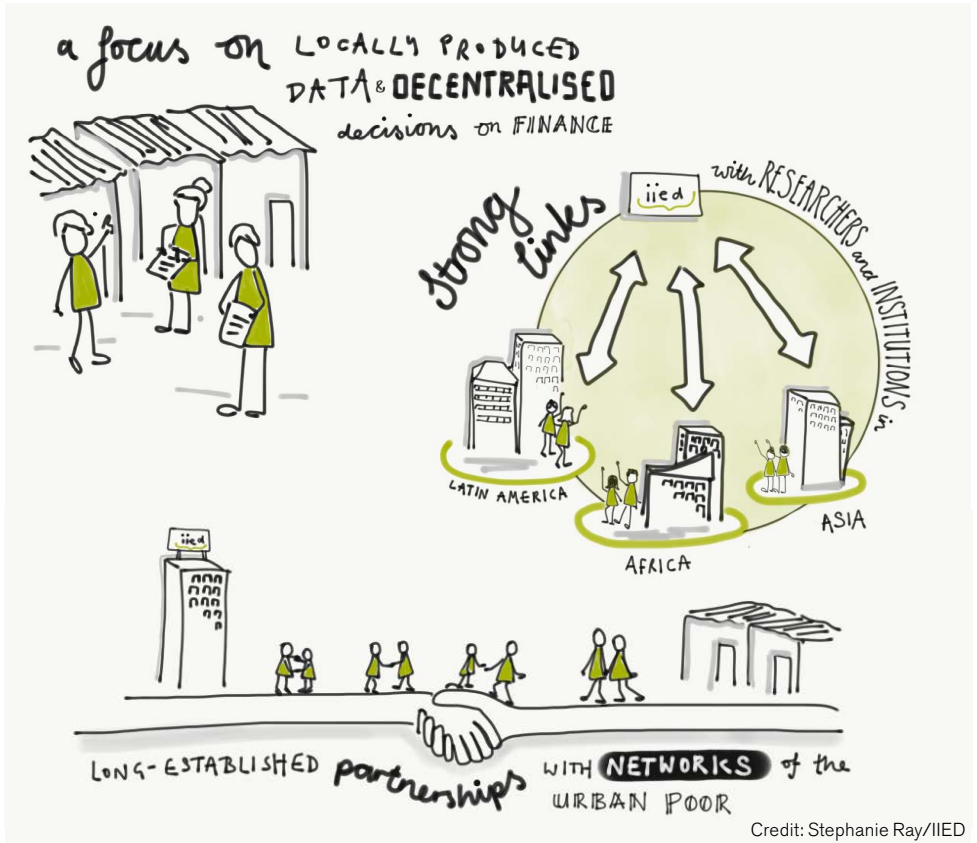
Urban populations are increasingly facing both acute and chronic crises, arising from climate change, natural disasters and man-made conflicts. Our work has investigated what makes urban populations vulnerable. We have worked with civil society and local governments to develop their capacities to assess 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

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.

Our priorities



Recent achievements

- We contributed to policy units, preparatory meetings and side events at Habitat III in October 2016
- In 2018, *Environment & Urbanization* celebrates 30 years of publishing. There were 330,908 full text article downloads in 2017 and over 2.7 million in total over the life of the journal
- We began documenting urban responses to humanitarian crises and hosted a landmark Urban Crises conference, bringing a wide group of stakeholders together in 2017
- We exposed the health burden in informal settlements in papers published in *The Lancet* in 2016 and highlighted how, through community data collection, residents are developing their own solutions and encouraging local governments to work with them
- We have produced new research documenting how local funds are improving conditions in informal settlements and addressing residents' most pressing needs.

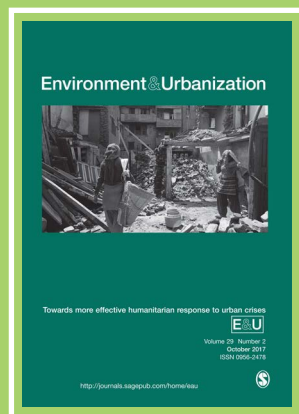
Environment and Urbanization journal

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

www.facebook.com/EnvironmentandUrbanization

@EandUjournal



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 promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges. We support some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in decision making.

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Institutional
Materials

Urban

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Photo credits:

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