Policies for friendly cities: the need for a new approach by governments and the donor community

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Abstract. Since the 1990s, the major issues in the world’s cities of Developing and Emerging Economy Countries have in some few cases improved in terms of the percentage of urban population living without appropriate housing and access to essential services- but in terms of numbers such population has severely increased. The theory by which economic development would automatically produce a trickle down effect that would take care of the needs of the poor has proved ineffective, and while the middle-lower classes have seen their lot improved, the lowest income groups are more destitute then ever- and more and more vulnerable to natural disasters. The approach of Governments and the donor community needs to be radically revisited, with a new urban policy agenda that should put emphasis on support to the lowest income groups, and relying on the informal sector as the main actor in implementing such support. The impacts of Climate Change and the increased frequency and severity of natural catastrophes also call for such a revised approach. The two-step approach to interventions in disasters situations – i.e. providing temporary shelters and only subsequently reconstructing homes- is ineffective and wasteful.

1. Foreword
In the last 30 years, the problems of the world’s cities have become more pressing despite many promises and the proclaimed efforts of national governments, local governments, and the international donor community.

Key parameters indicate that there are more people living in slums, less people have access to fundamental services such as water and sanitation; that inequality has become worse, as have criminality, pollution, and public health. More people are vulnerable to natural disasters.

The world has changed profoundly over these years, and policies have been reformulated albeit with little success in resolving these key issues.

That is not to say that governments have been idle; but the sheer and growing size of the issues, the economic conjuncture, war, terrorism and climate change have been as many obstacles towards reversing the negative trends.

But have these obstacles been addressed in an adequate way?

In this paper, a frank and transparent analysis is made of the key policy decisions that have informed action to address the urban issues.
As a veteran member of the international donor community, the author has felt the responsibility of discussing the choices made by the donors and the international financing institutions. These choices have not simply moved vast amounts of money in one direction rather than the other. Even more importantly, the international financing institutions have also influenced the policies of national governments through the mechanisms of conditionality.

And it must be said that, by and large, the international donor community has downscaled on its agenda the importance of addressing urban problems. And this is particularly true when we consider the specific issue of housing for the lowest income sectors of the population and the support to the informal sector.

The justification for this choice was that economic development and the reform of Governance should take priority as economic development would produce a trickle-down effect that would provide local governments and the low income groups with the means to address the urban issues, including housing for all.

More pragmatically, we can say that the donors shied away from addressing the housing problem, considering it intractable because of its complexities and its dimension; because of the collection of past failures and because the instruments to address it would be at odds with the neoliberal doctrines based on privatisation, on the scaling down of government, on the preference for the initiative of multinationals as opposed to supporting the small and medium enterprises and the informal sector.

Today we witness the failure of these doctrines, if looked upon from that part of humanity which is that to share the crumbs of the world’s economy while an always more restricted minority becomes increasingly wealthy. The neoliberal promises have not been kept and they never will be.

A new approach is required if the issues of the world’s cities must be realistically addressed and conditions for life in these cities must rise even to barely acceptable standards for all those who do not belong to the high and medium income groups.

2. What do we mean by a Friendly city?
A friendly city is a city that affords to its citizens safety and quality of life in a sustainable framework.

- Safety means security as well as protection against natural disasters
  - Social harmony is the base of security
  - A healthy environment; is the base for Disaster Risk reduction;
- Quality of life means stability, inclusion, and a future for all
  - Stability means a society that is resilient – against socio economic upheavals and against climate change
  - Inclusion means that the divide between the rich and the poor is contained within acceptable limits, and that the minimum needs for a decent standard of living are ensured to everyone- a roof, clean water,
  - A future for all means an urban society that gives everyone a fair chance – where young people have something to aim for within their reach, where those who fall can rise again and rebuild their lives.
- Sustainability means that society rests on a solid basis of social pacts, environmental safeguards and solid economy – within built resilience against. Building resilience across the social spectre is essential to build a friendly city – not simply for the good of the most vulnerable groups, but also to prevent an increase in social conflicts that will undermine society as a whole. Such is the dream.- indeed, a huge challenge before us.

At the New York UN Summit of the year 2000, Governments and Donors committed themselves to the Millennium Development Goals, to be reached by the year 2015, whose achievement would be a first, crucial step for the dream to come true. So where are we now?
3. Cities in the last 20 years-what has changed and what hasn’t.
More than half of the world’s population is now living in cities, having surpassed the 4 Billion mark – a result of the combined effects of population growth and migration towards the cities.

The trend of an increasing urban population as a percentage of the total world population shows no sign of abating, and shows a constant growth in the last 50 years, during which such percentage has doubled.

In numbers, the world’s urban population is now increasing by 77 million per year.

![Image of urban population growth chart]

**Figure 1.** based on data from « Urbanization and human development- Emerging Futures, UNHABITAT, Nairobi, 2016 »

Such an enormous concentration of people in the urban environment, coupled with the depopulation of the rural areas is of course a major issue, as the urban environment becomes increasingly stressed...
under every point of view - social, economic, environmental - and at the same time rural areas experience degradation.

For these reasons, until the 90s, the accelerating and uncontrolled urbanization was unanimously considered a negative process, that authorities should attempt to check with the support of the donor community.

However, at the beginning of the millennium, neoliberal economists in some of the International Finance Institutions (IMF, WB) reversed this view, on the basis of the simplistic consideration that cities are the hubs of productivity, and since what is good for the economy must per force be good for the people, urbanization should not be checked but on the contrary it should be encouraged.

But if cities are highly productive it is because of the concentration of cheap workforce that they produce -a workforce which lives under such conditions that it is eager to accept the poorest of salaries: we are referring to the population of the slums. They have left a rural society which, for all its drawbacks, ensured them a place in society, a measure of dignity, a home of some kind, water and clean air – as well as the solidarity of their peers.

These same people have left a void in the rural areas, a void that will be filled by large agricultural companies, that will take over the land, making it more “productive” - but only in monetary terms, and ignoring the collateral damage. Nowhere is this phenomenon more evident than in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the multinationals are buying out tribal lands, chasing towards the misery of the urban slums entire communities that have always lived through subsistence agriculture - a phenomenon we know as “land grabbing”.

At the end of the day, the neoliberal line of thinking roundly ignores the huge price which is being paid in social and in environmental terms for urbanisation – a price which is increasing even faster than the population, and which sets off periodical crisis at huge economic and social cost, in terms of catastrophes, social upheaval, and the proliferation of terrorism and war. When these factors are taken into consideration, the pro-urbanization logic no longer holds, even in barely economic terms.

Certainly, checking migration from the rural areas towards the cities has never been easy and never will.

To redefine urbanization as a positive, rather than a negative trend is just the easy way out. Instead of implicitly admitting being powerless, let us be brave and tackle the issue with a fresh approach and determination.
4. How the urban poor became a low priority

As the neo-liberal doctrine of urbanization as a positive factor was being born, cities were dropped to the bottom in the agenda of the global policy makers— not necessarily the Heads of State or Prime Ministers, but certainly the top officials of the International Institutions, first and foremost the World Bank and the European Union.

In the early ‘90s, the World Bank, formerly the major source of funding for low-cost housing and sites and services schemes for the benefit of the local poor, made dramatic changes in its policy.

It would now no longer target the poor, but the middle and middle lower income groups; middle income countries took priority over the poorest; large loans preferred to small loans; mortgage refinancing took the place of sites and services schemes.

At the same time, the EU was moving along similar lines, to the extent of dismantling the technical capabilities for housing and low cost urban services in its crucial operating arm, the Directorate General for Development in Brussels.

How to explain such change?

These were the years when the West won the cold war.

- 1989: fall of the Berlin Wall
- 1991: dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Neoliberalism and Thatcherism (under Margaret Tatcher the UK’s Government spending on housing went down by 67%) have triumphed at last. Socialists in the West were now out of power, and so they would remain for many years to come; such that the market logic prevailed upon all other considerations.

The dismantling of welfare brought by the Neoliberals sweeps across Europe, and beyond.
And it is this philosophy that the International Institutions no longer built housing for the low income groups, but also cut down on Hospitals and schools, as well as services such as water, sanitation etc, for which the privileged road was now privatization and project financing- except that both of these approaches were based on market value payment for the essential services, which the urban poor and the dwellers of slums could never afford.

The emphasis was shifted on the productive sectors and on the so called “structural adjustment” – a term which means major cuts to Government spending across the board.

Things were not made any better through the new policy of decentralization – a mantra that met with much success on paper, but countless failures when it came to practice: for a simple reason.

Responsibility for the cities was transferred to the local Governments.

In the western world, such governments receive reasonable funding- 6 to 8 % of GDP, with Switzerland reaching as high as 9.7 %.

But in developing countries, it is a far cry from such levels of funding. A study of local Government funding as a % of GDP on 18 African countries showed two of them below 1%, five in the 1-4,9% bracket, eight in the 4,9-5% and only 3 above 5%. India’s rate is 1% of GDP.

In other words: at the very moment when the International funding institutions decided to look the other way, also the National Governments got rid of the issue of providing the urban poor with decent housing and services, passing the buck to the Local governments.

Urban poor and slum dwellers would be on their own.

But to what extent have these decisions really been driven by a logical and conscious policy- however cynical- to apply a fundamentalist free market approach?

It is legitimate to suspect that there was another motive. Donors and international institutions had met with too many failures in their approach to the urban issues in the developing world. Not only were the problems immense, but their way of operating, their approach to project design and management practices were inadequate. Rather than to address this matter head on, admit their shortcomings and embark on the difficult road to finding solutions, it was convenient to sweep the issues under the carpet.

Neoliberalism provided a framework that could make taking this decision ethical – more or less.

And so, the decision was taken.

Today, the world’s faith in neoliberalism and uncontrolled globalization has crumbled.

It is time to face the issues of urbanization, with a fresh and braver approach to its immense problems

5. Housing for the low income groups (i.e. For the poor)

The number of people living in slums across the world has increased by one hundred million between 1990 and 2014. There are now over 900 million people living in slums – with little or no access to water and sanitation, exposed to robbery and rape, floods, cyclones, and sea level rise.

In this period, the slums population in sub saharian Africa has doubled.

Western Asia has seen the sharpest percentage increase, while Eastern and Asia have shown a milder growth rate of their slums population.

Northern Africa has been the only region where slums have decreased according to 2014 data- although we do not know what may have happened since then with the huge migration towards Europe and the various wars.

The growth of the slums has been fuelled by three factors: migration from the rural areas towards the cities, demographic growth and the impoverishment of the lower income groups- more and more people that became even more poor.

At the same time, housing policies in the developing and in the emerging economies have proved unable to deal with the problem.

The neoliberal catchword on housing has been “enabling”. It meant that market conditions should be created where “affordable” housing would be stimulated – then the problem would be solved by the market itself.

Schemes were drawn up and developed to provide housing to be financed through long term subsidized loans, repaid through direct withdrawing from salaries.
Except that this theory hinged on the concept of “affordability”- which has a completely different for someone who has permanent employment and a jobless slum dweller.

The “enabling” policy benefitted the lower middle classes- but did nothing for the slum dwellers, who had seen progress with the sites and services schemes that the same donors had developed before the 1990s but now had been abandoned in favour of the enabling policy.

For the slum dwellers “affordable” meant exactly- well, a slum.

We have discussed how the urban poor became a low priority. There are also some specific factors which concerned housing from the donors’ point of view.

Low cost housing projects are difficult to manage, far more so than building a road or an airport. There is a huge number of stakeholders, often unruly ones. Land title issues may arise. Cultural factors may also become an issue. Funds management is tricky. The donor can easily come under criticism. The scale of the problem is such that donor intervention may seem completely inadequate.

All of this is true; and yet are these reasons enough for the mammoth donor organisations to avoid tackling an issue which is so critical to the lives of so many, and also to the stability of society?

Or should these issues on the contrary be considered as so many more reasons for the donors to bravely engage in supporting the beneficiary governments and their people in addressing such a difficult problem?

Donors shrink away from the low cost housing issue- only a minute fraction of funding is dedicated to it.

Again, the neoliberal economists had devised a justification. The prevailing doctrine is that they should concentrate on developing the economy- and that in this way a trickledown effect will be generated, that will reach the poor and enable them to provide for their housing themselves.

Today, the 900 million people living in slums bear witness otherwise.

### Table 1. Urban Slum Population at Mid-Year by Region (Thousands)

| Region                        | 1990   | 1995   | 2000   | 2005   | 2007   | 2010   | 2014   |
|-------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Developing Regions            | 689,044| 748,758| 791,679| 830,022| 845,291| 871,939| 881,080|
| Northern Africa               | 22,045 | 20,993 | 16,892 | 12,534 | 13,119 | 14,058 | 11,418 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa            | 93,203 | 110,559| 128,435| 152,223| 163,788| 183,199| 200,677|
| Latin America & the Caribbean | 106,054| 112,470| 116,941| 112,149| 112,149| 112,742| 104,847|

| Region                 | 1990   | 1995   | 2000   | 2005   | 2007   | 2010   |
|------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Eastern Asia           | 204,539| 224,312| 238,366| 249,884| 250,873| 249,591|
| Southern Asia          | 180,960| 189,931| 193,893| 195,828| 196,336| 195,749|
| South-eastern Asia     | 69,567 | 75,559 | 79,727 | 80,254 | 79,568 | 84,063 |
| Western Asia           | 12,294 | 14,508 | 16,957 | 26,638 | 28,527 | 31,974 |
| Oceania                | 382    | 427    | 468    | 515    | 534    | 563    |

Source: UN-Habitat, Global Urban Observatory Urban Indicators Database 2015.
6. Access to water

Access to clean water falls under MDG Goal 7.

Theoretically, this is the one point in which the greatest progress has been made, as by the year 2010, 91% of the world population have access to improved drinking water. This percentage is even higher for the urban population where a level of 96% has been reached according to official data.

Eastern Asia and Western Asia have only registered a 1% improvement over a 25 years period.

Sub-Saharan Africa, Northern Africa, Oceania, Caucus and Central Asia are the regions that are lagging behind. In these regions, the urban population is better off than the rural population; however progress over 25 years still leaves a lot to be desired:

Sub-Saharan Africa progressed by 4% but only reached a coverage ratio of 87% of the urban population and 68% of its total population.

Overall, drinking water supply to the urban population of the least developed countries only reached 86%, improving by 4% between 1990 and 2015.

What is this means in practice is that 663 million people still lack acceptable drinking water.
7. Access to sanitation

If access to acceptable drinking water still falls below legitimate expectations, the situation as regards sanitation is far worse.

In the least developed countries sanitation is accessible only to 47% of the urban population;

In sub-Saharan Africa it is accessible to 40% and in southern Asia it is accessible to 67%. This compares with As an average ,in developing countries it is accessible to 77%.This compares with the world average of 82%.

The targets set with the millennium development goals has been missed by 700 million people worldwide.

Overall, this means that today there are over 2,4 billion people in the world that have no sanitation.

Table 2. Regional and Global Estimates for Improved Sanitation

| Region                        | Year | Population (000) | Percentage urban population | Use of sanitation facilities (percentage of population) | Progress towards MDG target | Proportion of the 2015 population that gained access since 1990 (per cent) |
|-------------------------------|------|------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sub-Saharan Africa            | 1990 | 510118           | 27                          | Unimproved: 39, Improved: 30, Other Unimproved: 21, Open Defecation: 10 | Not Met                     | 17                                                                          |
|                               | 2015 | 988784           | 38                          | Unimproved: 40, Improved: 34, Other Unimproved: 18, Open Defecation: 8 | Met Target                  | 41                                                                          |
| Northern Africa               | 1990 | 119863           | 49                          | Unimproved: 90, Improved: 6, Other Unimproved: 2, Open Defecation: 2 | Met Target                  | 36                                                                          |
|                               | 2015 | 177451           | 56                          | Unimproved: 92, Improved: 7, Other Unimproved: 1, Open Defecation: 0 | Met Target                  | -                                                                           |
| Eastern Asia                  | 1990 | 1236934          | 29                          | Unimproved: 71, Improved: 5, Other Unimproved: 22, Open Defecation: 2 | Not Met                     | 32                                                                          |
|                               | 2015 | 1487313          | 57                          | Unimproved: 87, Improved: 6, Other Unimproved: 7, Open Defecation: 2 | Met Target                  | -                                                                           |
| Eastern Asia without China    | 1990 | 71505            | 71                          | Unimproved: - , Improved: - , Other Unimproved: - , Open Defecation: - | Not met                     | -                                                                           |
|                               | 2015 | 85727            | 77                          | Unimproved: 82, Improved: 10, Other Unimproved: 6, Open Defecation: 2 | Met Target                  | -                                                                           |
| Southern Asia                 | 1990 | 191647           | 27                          | Unimproved: 54, Improved: 15, Other Unimproved: 9, Open Defecation: 22 | Not met                     | 39                                                                          |
|                               | 2015 | 1793616          | 35                          | Unimproved: 67, Improved: 19, Other Unimproved: 7, Open Defecation: 7 | Not met                     | 41                                                                          |
| Southern Asia without India   | 1990 | 322757           | 29                          | Unimproved: 66, Improved: 11, Other Unimproved: 17, Open Defecation: 6 | Not met                     | -                                                                           |
|                               | 2015 | 511225           | 40                          | Unimproved: 77, Improved: 15, Other Unimproved: 8, Open Defecation: 14 | Met Target                  | -                                                                           |
| South-easter Asia             | 1990 | 443735           | 32                          | Unimproved: 69, Improved: 9, Other Unimproved: 9, Open Defecation: 13 | Not met                     | 41                                                                          |
|                               | 2015 | 633031           | 48                          | Unimproved: 81, Improved: 10, Other Unimproved: 2, Open Defecation: 7 | Met Target                  | 39                                                                          |
| Western Asia                  | 1990 | 126752           | 61                          | Unimproved: 94, Improved: 1, Other Unimproved: 3, Open Defecation: 2 | Not met                     | -                                                                           |
|                               | 2015 | 228476           | 70                          | Unimproved: 96, Improved: 4, Other Unimproved: 0, Open Defecation: 0 | Met Target                  | -                                                                           |
| Oceania                       | 1990 | 6461             | 24                          | Unimproved: 75, Improved: 9, Other Unimproved: 13, Open Defecation: 3 | Not met                     | -                                                                           |
|                               | 2015 | 10863            | 23                          | Unimproved: 76, Improved: 10, Other Unimproved: 11, Open Defecation: 3 | Not met                     | 15                                                                          |
| Latin America & the Caribbean | 1990 | 445206           | 71                          | Unimproved: 80, Improved: 6, Other Unimproved: 8, Open Defecation: 6 | Not met                     | 36                                                                          |
|                               | 2015 | 630065           | 80                          | Unimproved: 88, Improved: 7, Other Unimproved: 4, Open Defecation: 1 | Met Target                  | 24                                                                          |
| Caucasus and Central Asia     | 1990 | 66308            | 48                          | Unimproved: 95, Improved: 3, Other Unimproved: 2, Open Defecation: 0 | Not met                     | 10                                                                          |
|                               | 2015 | 83078            | 44                          | Unimproved: 95, Improved: 5, Other Unimproved: 0, Open Defecation: 0 | Met Target                  | -                                                                           |
| Developed regions             | 1990 | 1153510          | 72                          | Unimproved: 96, Improved: 3, Other Unimproved: 1, Open Defecation: 0 | Not met                     | -                                                                           |
|                               | 2015 | 1268643          | 78                          | Unimproved: 97, Improved: 2, Other Unimproved: 1, Open Defecation: 0 | Not met                     | 10                                                                          |
| Developing regions            | 1990 | 4147024          | 35                          | Unimproved: 69, Improved: 10, Other Unimproved: 12, Open Defecation: 9 | Not met                     | -                                                                           |
|                               | 2015 | 6032677          | 49                          | Unimproved: 77, Improved: 13, Other Unimproved: 7, Open Defecation: 3 | Not met                     | 32                                                                          |
8. Inequality and exclusion

Inequality has become a major emerging urban issue, as the gap between the rich and the poor in most countries is at its highest level since 30 years.

This policy issues important to the extent that in different countries and cities the urban divide both stigmatises and excludes. It stigmatises and even removes large groups of urban population from a socially and economically productive life; and it excludes by preventing them and their children from benefiting from opportunities to advance in the society at large.

In the 1950s, the economist Simon Kuznets theorised the growth of the economy would eventually narrow the difference between the rich and the poor. As countries experienced growth, massive irrigation) opportunities which, in turn, would increase inequality and shift political power to local income groups in order to change government policies. But reality has proved very different.

The large cities of the United States of America-New York, for example-experience the hardest levels of inequality, similar to those of developing country cities such as Abidjan, Nairobi, Buenos Aires and Santiago.

The Gini coefficient is an internationally accepted parameter that measures economic exclusion.

It measures the inequality in the distribution of income in a population group. A Gini coefficient of zero means that there is perfect equality for all people have the same income, while a genie coefficient of one means that a single person possesses all the income of that group.

According to an analysis by UN Habitat of 48 selected cities “Africa has the highest levels of persisting urban inequality, Latin America shows the next button with high incomes but relatively high levels of inequality; while Asia shows the lowest levels of urban inequality.” (United Nations Settlement programme (UN-HABITAT), 2016)

The global trend is for inequality to increase, and the recent years of crisis have highlighted and aggravated such tendency. It is interesting to observe all how inequality has increased in the United States of America and in Europe as well as in China, but do the contrary it seems to have somewhat decrees in developing countries. This definitely challenges the neoliberal theory of welfare being produced by the trickle-down effect.

If the organisation of urban space is the reflection of the organisation of society, then the recent developments that we witness as a consequence of inequality would indicate a return to the middle ages.

This is a reference to them multiplication of walled communities built for the rich and separated from the city of the poor by walls and armed guards. These communities organise their own urban services (water, electricity, sewerage and the likes- and therefore are not affected by the lack of such services for the rest of the urban population.

This is not different from the way in which aristocracy use to live in its mediaeval castles.

Here, the issue is not so much whether the affluent should be able to ensure their security and comfort but rather that having done so, the rich and powerful should not forget the issue of how to provide decent levels of living for the poor and weak.

9. Disasters and Climate Change

The frequency and severity of catastrophes keeps growing- and it is not an impression driven by increased media coverage, but unfortunately it is a scientifically proven fact.

Disasters happen more often – what is technically called their “time of return” becomes shorter and shorter. The strict of extreme events- such as cyclones- also grows dramatically- as witness the number of cyclones in the upper scale of the Saffir-Simpson scale, that is, the ones with wind speeds above 300 kms/hour.
Climate change, by bringing about an increased frequency and severity of natural disasters, poses a growing challenge of protection for the urban populations. Warmer temperature of the oceans provides the energy from which cyclones develop. More violent and concentrated rains, falling upon soil that has been hardened by a previous drought are the cause for flooding above unseen levels. Even earthquakes and tsunamis become more frequent, because changes in temperature also mean changes in the weight of huge masses of seawater, whose pressure on the seafloor changes, influencing the movements of tectonic plates.

But extreme events are only the sharp end of climate change. Slow, creeping transformations undermine the resilience of society, especially that of the most vulnerable groups, that are the most dependent on natural resources and the quality of the environment, on which they depend for water and means of heating or refreshing their homes.

The urban population is variously vulnerable to disasters. Earthquakes of the same strength will thousands in Haiti, and nobody in Japan. Cyclone Irma killed but a few in Florida, but cyclone Haiyan killed 4,000 in the Philippines.

Urban planning and governance and construction techniques have a direct link to vulnerability; But planning and designing more resilient cities is only a start. Thought and design must be followed by implementation; decisions must be followed with action. The tragedy in Freetown, where a massive mudslide killed over 1000 people should be taken as a warning for the millions that are living on marginal land- meaning on shallow river banks, or too close to the sea shore, or below cliffs that are prone to sliding, and so on. These dangerous sites are not built upon, by the formal sector, and so the informal sector occupies them, and slthey become slums: - frail dwellings built on the most dangerous sites.

And of course, when disaster strikes, there is an immediate need for thousands and thousands of new homes.

In the best case, governments act only on marginal scale in facing this phenomenon by providing basic services, spatial organisation, and an acceptable quality of life.

But let’s face it - a policy to reduce vulnerability would entail the relocation of millions from the slums to safer ground.

There are two conclusions to be drawn on this point:

- A huge effort is needed and will increasingly be needed on building for the most vulnerable.
- Unless and until we are able to move people to safer ground, disaster will strike and emergency interventions will be needed.

But emergency aid and reconstruction need to be revisited not to repeat some awful mistakes.

10. The 2016 New Urban Agenda
The UN Habitat’s “World Cities – 2016” report draws an overall picture of the present situation, trends and issues in a global perspective.

It also provides a frank and critical analysis of the shortcomings of the policies of the last 20 years, and proposes recommendations on tackling the emergent and priority issues.

At the root of this analysis, are the major changes that have marked the shaping of world policies in this period, namely:

- When the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development was held in Quito last year, it adopted a « A new urban agenda. »

Unfortunately, the deliberations of the Conference were nowhere near as precise and to the point as had been the UN Report. United Nations Settlement programme (UN-HABITAT), (2016). Urbanization and Human Development - Emerging Futures. (United Nations Settlement programme (UN-HABITAT), 2016)

The “Agenda” full of recommendations- in fact it contains no less than 175 points in its 66 pages. The menu of proposals and commitments is extremely varied- so much so, in facts that it holds promises for everyone- slum dwellers, city administrators, the private sector, the building industry, the very rich and the very poor.

The problem is that promising everything to everyone all too often means delivering nothing to many.
The key issues which were raised in the frank analysis of the “World Cities 2016 report” have been lost in the “New Urban Agenda” - yes, they are there, but drowned in myriad of other recommendations, many of which propose, once again, the old approach, and will produce persistent problems.

11. The importance of setting priorities: Focus on housing
The opposite to promising everything, is to set specific, implementable priorities for concrete action- and to make tangible commitments towards these priorities.

Therefore, we should go back to the analysis of key issues, and choose precise priorities for action.

Central to all other issues, is the matter of finding the way to build housing for the lower income groups- masses of houses, at a very low cost and yet solid, lasting, and protected from catastrophes.

If housing for the poor is not solved, neither will be the issues of security, disaster resilience and protection of the environment.

Tens of millions of people who are living on the worst marginal land will move away from the rising sea and from the floods- this is not a possibility, but a given. This move may take place in an organised way, with governments structuring and controlling it, before disaster strikes- or else, it could take place among chaos, and loss of life and proprieties.

Slum dwellers will have to choose whether to submit to criminals or to join them.

Disease will flourish in the slums, striking the most vulnerable first and then spreading outside the slums to the rest of the cities.

The slums may be upgraded, improving homes and providing water, sanitation and basic services- or they may continue to fester and provide the breeding grounds for disease, environmental degradation and crime.

And so, although providing housing for hundreds of millions is a mammoth challenge, it simply cannot be escaped.

The time has come to face it, and to so with a fresh approach.

12. Mistakes repeated:
The task before us is daunting by its size and complexity. It will take the efforts and skills of thousands of architects and engineers, hundreds of thousands of construction workers, the will of determined leaders, and billions of dollars. It will not be an easy ride; there will be frustrations and mistakes, but one way or the other, humanity will succeed; it always does in the end.

But where to start?
We should not be looking for magic solutions. Many pieces of the puzzle must come together, and be fitted through trial and error.

Our first objective should be to stop the situation from worsening.
At each time that Governments, Donors and their experts meet at an international Conference- be it on Environment, health. Climate change or whatever- a typical 3-days agenda is followed.

- On Day 1, introductory speeches and presentation of the participants.
- On Day 2, selected participants present their achievements and “lessons learnt”, congratulating themselves and their peers.
- On Day 3, a resolutions and conclusions, closing speeches and goodbyes.

One emerges from these meetings with the exhilarating impression that everything is under control, and the international community is already solving whatever problems there may be.

Well, if that is the case, what was the point in holding an expensive conference?

An Australian expert, who used to work in Nias Island after the great tsunami, commenting on these conferences, remarked that one essential session was missing from the procedures: a session on “MISTAKES REPEATED”.

For it is only through the analysis of such mistakes that we can make progress. It takes a little bit of courage and thorough frankness.

In the previous sections of this paper, we have discussed the neoliberal theories on urbanization, the elimination of social housing from the agenda, the failure to provide essential services, the illusion of the trickledown effect as a means to decrease the social divide.
In this section, we shall deal specifically with the management and techniques used for housing and reconstruction projects—admitting mistakes before we look for solutions.

We shall begin by examining the construction component of emergency and post emergency aid—the actions that take place after a great catastrophe. These take place under the stewardship of the National Governments— in some cases, a strong stewardship, as in the case of BRR after the 2004 Tsunami—in other cases with a Government that is weaker and more easily influenced by the donors.

Every time a major catastrophe strikes, a standard catchword is proposed: “rebuilding better.”

While this concept can hardly be argued about, is broadening these huge and dangerous space for interpretation. Build better in what way? Which factors produce the vulnerability that these to be reduced? And to what extent can these factors be addressed within the reasonable timeframe and with the available means for reconstruction?

In most cases where the slums have been hit there are major issues linked to uncertain land tenure and absent the urban planning.

Such factors call for major institutional reforms—but these require plenty of time and an uncertain outcome.

Only after such reforms, so the theory goes, can sound reconstruction begin.

But what to do in the meantime with the masses of homeless?

Donors propose temporary shelter. This is supposedly to be replaced in due course with the effective reconstruction.

Except that, by and large, it simply does not happen and the temporary shelter becomes a permanent residence. But the shelters have not been built to last. And the shelters schemes are barely equipped with water, sanitation, and electricity.

Only rarely is a study made of the social and environmental impact of the shed showed the schemes and as a result all communities of fishermen and agriculture in these fine themselves that embossed references from their fields and their fishing grounds and began dependent on food aid rather than to reconstruct their work.

Little or no rules applied to the construction of shelters, such that architects, coming as international experts and mostly alien are to the local culture feel free to propose and construct according to the whim or to the personal interpretation of what is the best in the local conditions.

For example, having the side of on the basis of a cursory analysis of damage underpinned by insufficient technical knowledge that timber is the only way to reconstruct after an earthquake, then they resort to chopping down vast swaths of the remaining local forest arguing that the need for emergency must overrule environmental considerations. Others, under the same motivation, import shiploads of timber from the Americas only to discover that the local climate conditions and the tastes of the local termites are the most efficient consumers of the imported timber.

So, having supposedly taken care the emergency response through the provision of shelters, international support is no longer under media pressure and begins to look the other way.

Reconstruction—the real challenge is then reconsidered and now falls under development a no longer an emergency. This has important budgetary implications because it means that monies promised for reconstruction can be drawn from the previous commitments for development as opposed to being fresh and additional funding as was initially promised.

It further means that the standard bureaucracy will be applied, instead of the streamlined procedures for emergency aid. In conclusion; less money, and slowly disbursed.

Let us now examine another approach that has collected precious few successes and a myriad of failures.

What we know as pilot projects are meant to bring innovation to construction, developing example to be replicated at the hand of the ultimate beneficiaries—meaning the slum dwellers, or the population struck by catastrophes. In this optimistic approach, it is sufficient to show the way: people will follow on a wave of enthusiasm.

Except that these”pilots” seldom find any “passengers”—diffusion and replication fail to happen. The reason these innovations are not affordable all clash of local culture or require building skills and entrepreneurship which are simply not there, nor can they be improvised for replication and a wide enough scale.

Let us take the example of the interventions in Haiti after the earthquake of 2010.
Architects, engineers and construction companies had a field day—proposing a great variety of designs and materials, each supposedly with its special advantages.

With rare exceptions, the “innovations” only produced a few prototypes. Two years after the earthquake, only 5,700 houses had been built and 15,000 repaired—and 390,000 Haitians still lived in camps. (The New York Times, 2012)

On the other hand, some 125,000 temporary shelters had been built, at a cost of 500 million US dollars—over 4000 usd for what was basically a wooden shack with a lifespan of two to three years.

The irony is that, by that time, nearly half of the 13 Billion USD pledged by donors had been disbursed.

![Figure 4. temporary shelters at Tacloban, Philippines, 2015](image)

Even today, seven years after the earthquake, there are still at least 55,000 people in Haiti living under tarpaulins or makeshift tents.

From the experience in Haiti—which is but one of a pattern of repeated mistakes—two conclusions can be drawn:

1- The two phased approach to emergencies—first shelters, then reconstruction—is all too often a recipe for failure.
2- The pilot projects approach fails to produce significant results.

Where, then should we look for viable solutions?

13. The role and potential of the informal sector

While the massive donor effort was failing, Haitians were silently proceeding on their own with reconstruction. In the two years when the donors only built 5,700 homes, the Haitians built or reconstructed 50,000—ten times as much.

The key was resorting to the informal sector—the masons, carpenters and welders who are the real and only providers of some sort of housing for the world’s poor.

A few well inspired projects in Haiti worked with these people—providing them with tools and training to improve their work.

The workers of the informal building sector know what their clients can or cannot afford. They are trusted by their people, far more than alien experts proposing fancy solutions. Whatever improvements are made in their work, will be lasting and sustainable.

Informal sector workers are also used to recycling—how else are the informal settlements built?
And it is through these workers that innovation can really spread. Provided that it is geared to their capacity of absorbing new techniques and that they are really enabled to apply them with their own means, supplemented as the case may be by a contribution in aid.

Informal sector workers can make progress, through some elementary improvements (such as using screws rather than the nails in fixing key elements of wooden trusses, correct binding of roofs to masonry, etc.) through the serialization of the building components they most often produce, and through organised recycling – towards providing the local market with sound building components that even the slum dwellers can afford.

Small steps, basic technology, building on existing professionalism, improving the quality of the informal building sector: these are the keys to addressing the housing problem on a wide enough scale, be it in normal times or in the framework of reconstruction.

14. The opportunity of technologies

Much work has been dedicated by institutions and individuals of various extraction to developing low cost building techniques, local materials and recycling.

Some of these are fanciful - others are simple enough and cheap enough to be used in the kind of massive low cost housing constructions that our cities need.

We should not, at every turn, reinvent the wheel.

Rather, we should provide opportunities for the same informal sector we mentioned above, to witness directly the use of these technologies - for in many cases it is a matter of transferring over geographical boundaries what their peers in other countries have successfully practiced for centuries. It may well prove more effective to move master masons to learn from other master masons than to bring foreign experts to teach how to build in a context they do not know.

Some of the technologies have been developed in international projects, met with success, and then were promptly forgotten. Such is the case with the “Systeme Parapluie” developed by UN Habitat in Ivory coast in the late 70’s to equip 500 villages of the interior with schools and medical dispensaries. It was based on an intelligent mixture of light prefabrication and self-help construction- and it worked.

Another case was that of the low cost house developed with Italian cooperation in the Philippines - a design which allowed the construction of a 40 sq m earthquake and cyclone resistant house for 2000 usd per piece - but that was never diffused because bureaucracy could not figure out how to procure the recycled steel rods that were used with this design.

The above are but two of many possible solutions. What matters in each case is to thoroughly examine the real chances of a solution being diffused before it is even proposed.

Specifications should be established according to the local conditions - for example, what means of transportation and tools are available to the informal sector, what materials are available, the composition of atypical team of builders, what possibilities of recycling exist, and what are the specifications of the building to be produced.

If, for example, the carpenters can produce say three standard design roofing trusses - 3 meters, four meters and five meters’ span and produce them on a serial basis as a standard building component, the both quality and value for money will improve, at the same time without surpassing the affordable costs for the informal construction market. Other building components will be pillars, windows, foundation blocks, and so on- gradually developing a market for building components produced by the informal sector.

If quality should rise enough so that two storey buildings can be made - then the way will be open to embark on major slums restructuring, freeing land so that streets can be aligned, sanitation and drainage be built, and risky marginal land be abandoned.

At the end of the day, in each situation, the technological solution must be found working together with the informal sector, taking the time to understand and evaluate, rather than to rush in with alien ready made techniques.

Coming in with readymade solutions such as the T shelters in Haiti has proved in fact to be slow and horribly costly – not to mention the rapid degradation of this kind of structures,
Conclusions
To resume the conclusions of this paper are:
- People in the rural areas should not be encouraged to move to the megacities, but rather be supported to achieve a better quality of life on their land;
- Governments and the International donor community should afford the highest priority to improving the life of the lower income urban groups
- The issue of social housing must be addressed head on, abandoning once and for all reliance on the trickle down theory
- In a disaster situation, the two phased approach of temporary shelters followed by reconstruction should be abandoned, and reconstruction directly addressed, by proving financial and technical means to civil society and the informal sector
- Building the technical capacity and the entrepreneurship of the informal sector, through lasting technical and financial support is the most effective way to build resilience, reverse the

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