

35. Cities that Work: Building partnerships to improve urban policy making in developing countries

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Rapid urbanisation must be met with effective, evidence-based policy making in order to leave no one behind

Urbanisation will undoubtedly be a defining feature of the 21st century - particularly among developing countries, where many cities are growing at unprecedented speeds. So far, much urbanisation in developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, has proceeded without the commensurate gains in productivity and poverty reduction that have been seen in other contexts. Instead, concentrated populations have created major challenges for critical infrastructure and services such as housing, employment, health, education and safety. This places policy makers across the developing world at a critical juncture, where inaction could obstruct growth, leaving millions behind in the development process; or where well-implemented, evidence-based urban policies could unlock sustainable and inclusive development.

Improvements in economic research and data are consistently enhancing our understanding of the factors that shape the urbanisation process, but there are significant challenges in bringing these findings to bear on policies and practices that could improve outcomes. A key part of bridging this gap is ensuring that policy makers have clear, consistent and credible information to guide their decisions.

Structuring evidence to meet the needs of urban policy makers

In 2017, the International Growth Centre launched the Cities that Work initiative, a long-term collaborative programme to provide evidence-based support for urban policy making. The initiative is guided by the priorities of developing cities, with close feedback and direction from a committed network of researchers, policy makers and urban practitioners. The content produced is backed by rigorous research in urban economics, presented in a way that is accessible to those who must draw upon and implement it.

Acknowledging that different policies are needed in different contexts, the initiative guides decision-makers with a menu of policy options and associated trade-offs. Cutting-edge economic research is synthesised with the practical knowledge of policy makers and practitioners, and structured around practical decisions in four key areas: urban land use; urban infrastructure, housing and public services; firms and employment in cities; and municipal finance and urban governance.

Key outputs include:

- Research synthesis papers that reflect and inform the experiences of policy makers and practitioners.

- Case studies that outline the successes and challenges of various policy experiences to facilitate cross-city learning.
- Workshops that offer space for policy makers to internalise and provide feedback, as well as for peer-to-peer knowledge exchange.

Building partnerships for more effective urban policy making

Cities that Work owes its success to strong partnerships between researchers and policy makers and within policy partnerships. The programme is led by a diverse council of leading policy makers, practitioners and academics, who provide strategic leadership and direction for the initiative as well as contributions to research.² These and other partnerships have enabled Cities that Work to publish widely and have significant impact on development priorities for government and civil society. Having established itself as a source of evidence and analysis, the programme has convened many more top researchers and city leaders through high-profile events.

In one example of partnership, Cities that Work partnered with the city of Hargeisa, the capital of self-declared Somaliland, after Cities that Work manager, Astrid Haas was invited to co-chair Hargeisa's municipal finance task force and help establish reforms in the city administration. As part of this, Cities that Work organised a workshop on municipal finances and land and property taxes along with the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), sharing Kampala's successes in reforming local revenue administration. In 2018, Jennifer Musisi, the KCCA Executive Director and another Council member, also presented this success in the opening Urban Talk at the UN World Urban Forum.

Opportunities for future growth

Cities that Work is continuing to expand into other regions where it can add value and draw on the experiences of a wider set of countries. For example, it is currently partnering with UN-Habitat and the UK Built Environment Advisory Group on the design phase of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Global Future Cities Programme in 19 cities around Asia, Africa and Latin America, providing the evidence base for the programme design.

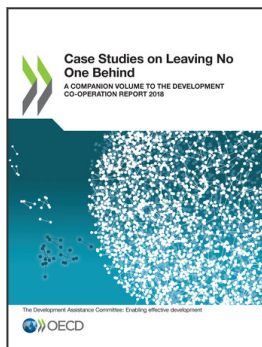
The programme is meanwhile committed to producing new, tailored content in response to specific demands from policy makers. For instance, it has given tailored research support to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Kabul on the topics of informal settlements, city governance and civil service reform.

Building on its content, the programme is also developing an intensive executive training course to be held at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford in 2019. The course will equip policy makers with the necessary frameworks for evidence-based decision making and deepen their understanding of interrelated areas in urban policy and how these can be co-ordinated. The ambition is to franchise this course globally to public policy schools.

Notes

¹ www.theigc.org/research-themes/cities/cities-that-work.

² The current composition of the Council is Ed Glaeser (Harvard University) as chair, Paul Collier (Oxford University), Patricia de Lille (Mayor, Cape Town), Astrid Haas (Manager, Cities that Work), Nasir Javed (Urban Unit Pakistan), Jonathan Leape (Executive Director, International Growth Centre), Jennifer Musisi (Executive Director, Kampala Capital City Authority), Naison Mutiza-Mangiza (Director for Africa, UN-Habitat) and Tony Venables (Oxford University).



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