



Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality
INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT BRIEF

#1

March 2020

Partnerships for Urban Equality

Reflections on Freetown and Havana,
based on KNOW participation in the 2019
UCLG Congress, Durban, South Africa



UK Research
and Innovation



This **International Engagement Brief** has been produced based on the participation of the KNOW team in the 2019 United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Congress, which took place the between 11th and 15th November 2019 in Durban, South Africa.

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Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) is a 4-year research and capacity building programme (2017-2021) that seeks to promote urban equality in selected cities in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Led by Prof Caren Levy of The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, it brings together an interdisciplinary international team of 13 partners in the UK, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Australia to develop innovative long-term programmes of knowledge co-production for urban equality among governments, communities, business, and academia. It is a unique gathering of places, people and their knowledge, innovation, and ingenuity. KNOW is funded by the ESRC under the Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF), a £1.5 billion research programme which forms part of the UK Aid Strategy.

For more information visit:

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Acronyms

CiLP	City Learning Platform
CoLP	Community Learning Platforms
CUJAE	Technological University of Havana
FCC	Freetown City Council
IPF	Institute of Physical Planning
KNOW	Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality
NUA	New Urban Agenda
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLURC	Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments

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Executive Summary

This brief summarises the discussion coming out of a session held at the 6th **United Cities and Local Government (UCLG)** Congress, in November 2019 in Durban, South Africa. The panel session entitled '*Partnerships for Urban Equality*' was hosted by the 'Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality' (KNOW) programme.

This session outlined the importance of placing urban equality at the centre of discussions, as key to securing the transformational aspirations of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda (NUA). In particular, it explored the critical role of establishing 'partnerships with equivalence' in order to build pathways to urban equality.

This involved inputs from representatives of two KNOW partner cities. From Freetown, Sierra Leone, contributions were made by **Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr** and **Braima Koroma** of the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC). From Havana, Cuba, **Dr. Anelis María Marichal González**, General Director of Territorial Planning and Urban Planning, at the Institute of Physical Planning (IPF) and **Prof. Jorge Peña Díaz** from the Technological University of Havana (CUJAE) made presentations. Expert comments were provided by **William (Billy) Cobbett**, Director of Cities Alliance, and **Prof. Ana Falú** from the Habitat International Coalition. Finally, the session was closed with the poem 'Life in the Slum, Still I Rise...' by Sierra Leonean poet and activist **Fatmata Shour**.

This brief reports on the content of these discussions, using grounded examples from Freetown and Havana to highlight the *principles* which underpin these partnerships. In doing so, this brief aims to further discussions with urban practitioners on the different kinds of partnerships which exist, how they are established and negotiated, and the conditions under which '**partnerships with equivalence**' can be practiced to promote greater urban equality.

Key Messages:

- Urban equality is a key and pressing concern which will shape how SDGs localisation processes take shape in urban areas
- If we do not understand the relationship between urban equality and the different SDGs, we run the risk of reinforcing inequalities in the future
- Addressing this challenge requires building '**partnerships with equivalence**': those which recognise the diverse skills, knowledges and values brought by different urban actors, and are formed through mutual respect, transparency and accountability, and a commitment to learn together
- The cases of Freetown, Sierra Leone and Havana, Cuba show us 'the art of the possible', different lessons for how partnerships with equivalence are formed and sustained
- The cases demonstrate the operation of eight principles that allow 'partnerships with equivalence' to flourish:
 - based on a **shared vision**, and **common purpose**
 - based upon **co-produced knowledge**
 - founded on **mutual respect**
 - grounded in **inclusivity** and **open to new actors**
 - co-constructed as **durable, strategic, and long-term**
 - rooted in a **local governance context**
 - **transparent** and **accountable**
 - embrace **diverse forms of engagement**

“ We know the phrase: “our own history, our own solutions” – and that has never been more appropriate than in these two cases we have heard here.”

Ana Falú

Habitat International Coalition

FRAMING THE AGENDA:

What do we mean by 'partnerships with equivalence' for the pursuit of urban equality?

By Prof **Caren Levy**, KNOW Principal Investigator



Urban equality is one of the most significant challenges underpinning processes of urbanisation.

Indeed, the importance of addressing urban inequalities has been recognised in global agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda (NUA). However, the question remains as to how these international agendas and commitments will be localised in a way that is meaningful to cities in different parts of the world.

More particularly, as these processes of localisation start to take shape, it raises the question of how goals such as urban equality relate to other aspirations expressed within these international agendas — for instance, around resilience, prosperity, or sustainability. In other words, there is a complex interaction in the nexus between these different issues, and as such they must be understood in relation to each other, not as a separate list of activities.

Critically, this means that if we do not treat urban equality alongside the other goals of the SDGs, we actually run the risk of reinforcing inequalities in future cities instead of addressing them.

It is clear therefore that to deliver on the aims of urban equality, we must work broadly: across sectors; across identities of class, gender, age, ethnicity, and the range of other important identities; as well as across the state, civil society, and the private sector. In other words, this is going to require building partnerships. And these partnerships must operate on the basis of what we call **‘partnerships with equivalence’**. We define these as:

“Partnerships which recognise the diverse skills, knowledges and values brought by different urban actors, and which are formed through mutual respect, transparency and accountability, and a commitment to learn together.”

Moreover, if we understand urban equality as linked with the *redistribution* of goods and services, the *reciprocal recognition*

“When we talk about partnerships, sometimes it ends up being a “kumbaya” type of language, which is dangerous. Because in a city, there isn't a common understanding of the city, and different interests are at play, so partnerships emerge. But you start with a negotiation. You have to play with different interests, and different visions of what a good city is.”

Billy Cobbett
Director of Cities Alliance

of diverse identities and aspirations, and *parity of political participation* in decision-making, then it is also clear that we must understand urban equality as context-specific: this definition of urban equality proposes a set of questions that can travel and find situated answers. In other words, we understand urban equality not simply as a set of universally applicable indicators, but as something that comes out of the cities themselves, and that is relational in its character.

What this means is that we need different kinds of knowledges in order to take up this challenge. In particular, we would argue that this requires a co-production of knowledge across partnerships. Therefore, establishing the criteria to co-produce knowledge is an important component of creating pathways towards greater equality.

Exploring precisely this, the KNOW panel session was framed around the concept of ‘partnerships with equivalence’. Looking at examples from two cities, Freetown and Havana, this brief demonstrates the possibilities, conditions, and especially the principles for building partnerships, and to co-create policy and planning that contribute to the development of pathways to the overall goal of urban equality.



“ We're on a journey to transform our city. And we're doing it through working with external partners, through transparency in reporting, through using innovation. And really building on the concept of how partnerships, inclusion, integration, breaking silos, can enable one to transform cities, and in our case, to Transform Freetown.”

Yvonne Aki-Sawyers
Mayor of Freetown

I. FREETOWN



PARTNERSHIP CASE #1

Transform Freetown Agenda, *Freetown City Council*

Freetown's **Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyers** set the scene for the developmental challenges faced by the city. She highlighted the rapid growth of the city following the end of the civil war (1991-2002), with over half a million new residents expected in the next decade. This comes with significant environmental and societal impacts, which disproportionately impact the urban poor, many of them migrants from rural areas of the country. The estimated 68-72 informal settlement areas in the city represent around 35% of the city's population. The environmental burdens faced by these residents –flooding, mudslides (including a significant event in 2017), and the 2014 Ebola crisis– are illustrative of the urban inequalities being experienced across the city.

Responding to the scale and speed of this urbanisation, Mayor Aki-Sawyers outlined the ambitious Transform Freetown agenda, aimed at delivering an integrated approach to the city's development. This plan, to be delivered within 3-4 years, identifies 11 priority sectors arranged into four clusters: resilience; human development; healthy cities; and urban mobility. It seeks inclusivity, is performance-driven, and under-pinned by innovation.

“Inclusivity means that our journey to understanding the key issues —our theory of change to actually move the dial in a situation such as ours— was not something we embarked upon on our own, but with all the partners in the city.”

Yvonne Aki-Sawyers
Mayor of Freetown

Key Principles of Partnerships in the Transform Freetown Framework

Critically, the Transform Freetown agenda is delivered through a partnership approach, which is underpinned by several key principles. Speaking directly to this, Mayor Aki-Sawyerr outlined **inclusivity** as a major driving principle of the agenda. As such, while delivered by the Freetown City Council (FCC), the Transform Freetown agenda was developed through an extensive process of ‘bottom-up’ consultation, mobilising over 15,000 people across 300 sessions to identify priority areas of intervention. This included stakeholders from the private sector, local and national government, development partners and NGOs, as well as representatives of grassroots groups — including slum dwellers associations, market traders, and other community groups.

Adopting inclusivity as the driving principle allows for the development of an **integrated** approach that brings together a combination of technical expertise, experience, research and community knowledge to address these urban challenges. Mayor Aki-Sawyerr outlined the key role played by KNOW partner institution SLURC, which participates in working groups on environmental management, urban planning and housing within the resilience cluster. While delivered by the FCC, the Transform Freetown agenda draws on a wide range of such partnerships to support the implementation of the agenda.

“ SLURC plays an integral role in some of the work we're doing [with Transform Freetown] in environmental management and in urban planning and housing.”

Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr
Mayor of Freetown

Finally, she highlighted the role of innovation and data-driven management as a way of supporting **transparency**. Through a multi-staged and collaborative process, a series of 19 measurable targets were developed, implemented through 37 initiatives. These 19 targets have been mapped against the SDGs as well as the National Development Plan of Sierra Leone. Outlining clear and measurable targets which the FCC can deliver on supports transparency, and in the longer-term, helps to build trust.

PARTNERSHIP CASE #2

Community and City Learning Platforms, Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC)

KNOW partner **Braima Koroma** presented the work of the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC), a globally connected centre which undertakes research and capacity building initiatives in cities across Sierra Leone, focused on the well-being of residents of informal settlements. He explored the concept of partnerships through the case of the 'Community Learning Platforms' (CoLP) and the 'City Learning Platform' (CiLP) in Freetown. These governance structures were established by SLURC as part of the KNOW programme in collaboration with the Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor and a network of government and civil society organisations. They aim to better address urban challenges impacting informal settlement residents in a participatory and sustained manner.

CoLPs include representatives from informal settlements, who meet periodically to undertake collective activities and identify priorities for their neighbourhoods. The CiLP is an open consortium which meets

“**At the community level, we are organised, so that the voice of those marginalised groups can also have a voice that will be heard at the city level.**”

Braima Koroma
SLURC

every three months, and includes representatives of local and national government, civil society groups, private sector actors, professional bodies, researchers, and members of the community platform. In this way, there is a dynamic feedback loop from the neighbourhood level to the city, establishing a democratic space in which knowledge related to informal settlements is co-produced at different scales.

Key Principles of Partnerships in the City and Community Learning Platforms

There are a number of key principles which have informed the setup of these structures. First, the platforms are founded upon a **shared vision and common purpose**. In this case, this means centring the concerns and challenges of informal settlement residents, as central to the development of pathways to urban equality.

Second, the commitment to **mutual respect** is understood as a route to build a trusted relationship. Critically, in the initial meetings of the City Learning Platform, its members acknowledged that not all actors may share trust to begin with, but that the shared discussion of these issues can be a valuable route to building stronger relations.

“ I think SLURC is a very interesting model that I wish other cities could learn from. It's bringing in that kind of institutional capacity and putting it to work in the interest of the city.”

Billy Cobbett
Director of Cities Alliance



Third is the commitment to the platforms being an **inclusive** space which is open to participation across different identities and stakeholders. At the community level, for instance, this meant ensuring representation of diverse groups—such as gender, tenure status, ability and age, in recognition that members with intersecting social identities will have different needs and aspirations. At the city-level, this means drawing on urban expertise from a broad range of stakeholders, as well as being open to new actors, dependent on the issues to be discussed in each forum.

Finally, the partnerships established through these platforms are founded upon the **co-production of knowledge-based solutions**. The platforms are committed to data-sharing and collective thinking, as a way of contributing to evidence-based decision-making, linked to the developmental priorities in both the Transform Freetown Agenda and the National Development Plan.

“ We work with communities, local authorities... The knowledge we deliver has to be useful, usable, and used... And that’s why we have to link up different city actors, embedding our research, and ensuring policy engagement processes.”

Braima Koroma
SLURC

“ It's very clear in Freetown, that they are claiming inclusivity. And inclusivity here is closely related to the ideas of equality and diversity.”

Ana Falú
Habitat International Coalition

“ Even though there has been a consistent commitment to build a society based on equality, the combined effects of external and internal forces have been shaping a scenario in which inequalities, particularly in urban contexts, have increased during the last 20 years. Havana has been the locus of the most intensive contradictions in this area.”

Jorge Peña Díaz
CUJAE

II. HAVANA



PARTNERSHIP CASE #3

Cuban New Urban Agenda, *Institute of Physical Planning*

Dr. Marichal González, General Director of Territorial and Urban Planning at the Institute of Physical Planning (IPF) presented the case of Havana. She highlighted the context of rapid urban and national change, marked by ongoing reforms of key institutional frameworks in the country. Taking place in parallel with global processes such as the SDGs and NUA, this has included shifts in national-level regulations related to physical and urban planning, land-use management, and the incorporation of new strategies for community involvement in decision-making processes.

In particular, Dr. Marichal González focused on the process of implementing the Cuban NUA, in what the IPF has called ‘a roadmap towards Habitat IV’, comprising a staged approach to 2036. Implementation is taking place through the National Action Plan (NAP) for the Cuban NUA (2017-2036), which outlines eight strategic axes and 24 work streams. Key to the NAP are targets around safe, resilient, and more equal settlements.

“ It is clear that the New Urban Agenda has to be defended, and for that we need new knowledge that has to come from all possible sources and actors.”

Jorge Peña Díaz
CUJAE

Key Principles of Partnerships in the Cuban New Urban Agenda

Fundamental to the design of the implementation plan for the Cuban NUA was an **inclusive** process of participation across civil society, local institutions, and other urban actors.

This took place through a number of activities, including a National Urban Forum, which was an open space for debate and consultation.

Diverse engagement strategies

and formats, such as good practice workshops with universities, and exchanges with experts from UN-Habitat, helped in the elaboration of ideas for the future cities that would localise the SDGs, from the perspective of a range of stakeholders.

At the core of this implementation is the notion of partnerships, looking to **co-produce** urban solutions with other government agencies and universities. This includes the ongoing collaboration with the KNOW Havana (KNOW HAV) project, which has played a strategic role in finding mechanisms to link with local communities and their needs. Dr. Marichal González outlined that the knowledge created through this collaboration will be used in the new urban frameworks, and highlighted the critical feedback loop between universities and government actors in this context.

“The National Urban Forum has been a space for debate and consultation, in which universities have shared best practices, which helped identify ideas for the city they want, towards the SDGs.”

“[In building the roadmap] we went through a very intense process of participation with civil society, local officials, universities, as well as other urban actors. All of this, with the target of achieving safer, more resilient, and more equal settlements.”

Anelis María Marichal González
Institute of Physical Planning

PARTNERSHIP CASE #4

MAS Habana & KNOW HAV, *Technological University of Havana (CUJAE)*

KNOW partner **Prof. Jorge Peña Díaz** explored the series of partnerships which have been established through the Technological University of Havana (CUJAE), which have contributed to shaping trajectories towards more equal urban futures.

One example is the partnership established around the agenda of Mobility and Accessibility, which is one of the strategic axes of the Cuban NUA. The association 'MAS Habana' (Mobility, Accessibility and Sustainability for Havana) is a collaboration between the Havana Transport Authority, the neighbourhood of Los Sitios, a Research Centre for Transport, and

the Havana Planning Authority. This alliance has been formed to help articulate a clear vision for the kind of mobility needed in the city, and to create a network to share knowledge around this. To achieve this purpose, MAS Habana has provided research support, facilitated participatory activities, and strengthened institutional capabilities in the field.

“The establishment of partnerships, such as with KNOW, creates alliances which can help respond to the particular challenges of different municipalities.”

Anelis María Marichal González
Institute of Physical Planning

A second example is the series of activities consolidated within the KNOW programme. KNOW Havana has created partnerships with five faculties within two universities, three national public institutions, four specialised city authorities, five municipal governments, and several communities. Working across four sites in Havana, these alliances are responding to the particular challenges of different municipalities, such as finance mechanisms, mobility, the aging population, and housing. The purpose of these partnerships has been to co-produce relevant knowledge able to influence the Cuban NUA, the planning tools of the city, and the trajectories of the four sites. Key to this has been the university positioning itself as a broker between local authorities and communities, and as a catalyser for urban transformation.

“Cuba is in a moment in which the country has been making a big bet for the role of science, and particularly for the role of universities in the development of the general structure of the city. So, the partnerships [of MAS and KNOW Havana] actually help to channel relevant knowledge coming from both international alliances, for example debates taking place in a space like UCLG, as well as those discussions taking place in communities.”

Jorge Peña Díaz
CUJAE

“ We had the opportunity to visit several cities in Cuba, and we were surprised to find the richness of different configurations that have been forged. So, in some cases, the university is actually managing the local budget for housing and other improvements. In other cases, it is more about the university providing knowledge for institutions. So a lot of different constellations have appeared.”

Jorge Peña Díaz
CUJAE



Key Principles of University Partnerships

These partnerships demonstrate a number of common principles. Firstly, they are **long term and forged on a common agenda** (such as inclusive mobility, or urban equality) rather than on a project by project basis. Secondly, this longevity means that they can adopt a **responsive approach**, which speaks to changing urban particularities. This flexibility also means staying open to new actors, that is, growing and adapting.

Third, leveraging the opportunity provided by the Cuban NUA, these partnerships speak directly to regulatory frameworks at the local, national, and international scale. They are therefore not positioned outside of the system, but **are rooted in the local governance context** in collaboration with local authorities.

Finally, they conduct co-production workshops as a tool to explore diverse perspectives on specific topics. The use of **creative means of facilitation** and engagement, such as hosting events like festivals, opens up possibilities for different knowledge and expertise to be shared.

“ We don't created partnerships to solve specific problems. We have created partnerships, and then we have been tackling different challenges.”

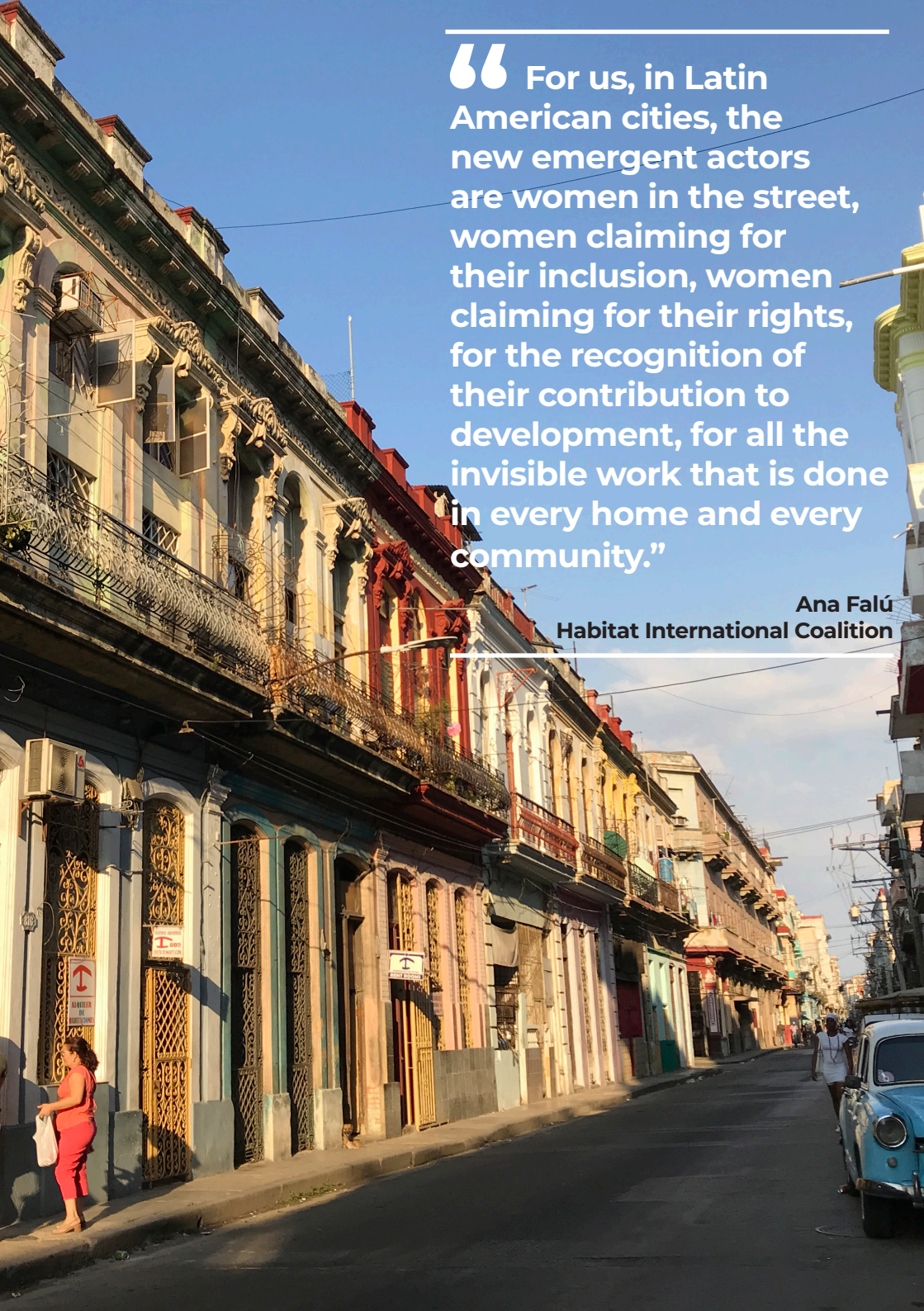
Jorge Peña Díaz
CUJAE

“ The knowledge that has been created out of these university partnerships is intended to have an impact on the implementation of the Cuban New Urban Agenda.”

Anelis María Marichal González
Institute of Physical Planning

“ For us, in Latin American cities, the new emergent actors are women in the street, women claiming for their inclusion, women claiming for their rights, for the recognition of their contribution to development, for all the invisible work that is done in every home and every community.”

Ana Falú
Habitat International Coalition



‘PARTNERSHIPS WITH EQUIVALENCE’: KEY PRINCIPLES

While the set of partnerships shared in the UCLG session by the speakers from Havana and Freetown reflect local conditions, they nonetheless started to reveal a set of overlapping principles that are important to the practice of good partnerships. Although they do not represent an exhaustive list, these principles start to indicate some of the conditions which allow ‘partnerships with equivalence’ to flourish, contributing to co-constructing pathways to urban equality:

Based on a shared vision, and

common purpose: A partnership that is driven by a collective project towards enhancing urban equality, and a commitment to co-learning

Based on co-produced knowledge:

A partnership that seeks to devise knowledge-based solutions that draw on the co-production of different kinds of everyday knowledges and expertise of partners

Founded on mutual respect:

A partnership that recognises that not all engagements may start from a position of trust, but that new relations can be built through respectful engagement

Founded on inclusivity and open to new actors:

A partnership with flexible membership which can draw in new people, involves a range of stakeholders, expertise and knowledges, and is sensitive to representation across diverse social identities

Co-constructed as durable, strategic, and long-term:

A partnership that is established on an ongoing (rather than project-by-project) basis, which is adaptable and responsive to the changing urban context, and grounded in a long-term and strategic vision

Rooted in a local governance context:

A partnership that focuses on local government but is in dialogue with decision making processes and regulatory frameworks at the local, national, or international scale

Transparent and accountable:

A partnership that sets and meets collectively agreed and clear targets and deliverables, based on open resource allocation and data/information sharing, and embedded in a long-term engagement

Embraces diverse forms of engagement:

A partnership that uses multiple communication technologies and modes of facilitation to engage diverse groups

Final Thoughts

As we move towards the localisation of the SDGs, this brief calls for a focus on how to implement and monitor progress in a way that puts urban equality at the centre through the formation of transformative relationships in the city.

Drawing on the broader work of the KNOW programme, it highlights the importance of co-producing relevant knowledge to analyse, plan, monitor, and compare city progress towards national and global goals. Through the presentation of the rich experiences in Freetown and Havana, this brief demonstrates the principles through which such relationships can be established, through the concept of **'partnerships with equivalence'**.

The eight key principles highlighted here are an initial set of reflections, which we feel can inform future localisation discussions and practices. It is through building on this relational notion of equality, and centring transformative partnerships, that we seek to build pathways to urban equality.



EXTRACT FROM POEM: 'Life in the Slums... Still I Rise'

By **Fatmata Shour**, Sierra Leonean poet

People recognize you by the way you talk and act,
that simply tells them where you are coming from,
"Ugh, you smell like someone coming from the slum."

You are nothing in the eyes of people living in the brand-new and
well-structured communities you see,
for as long as you are living in the slum, even if you are the next
President or First Lady to be.

I'm only fortunate to see my honorable or any government
stakeholder in time for an election.
After? No one cares about us, it feels like a rejection.
We are being extracted from being citizens, but we have a right to
light, life to shine, to rise.....

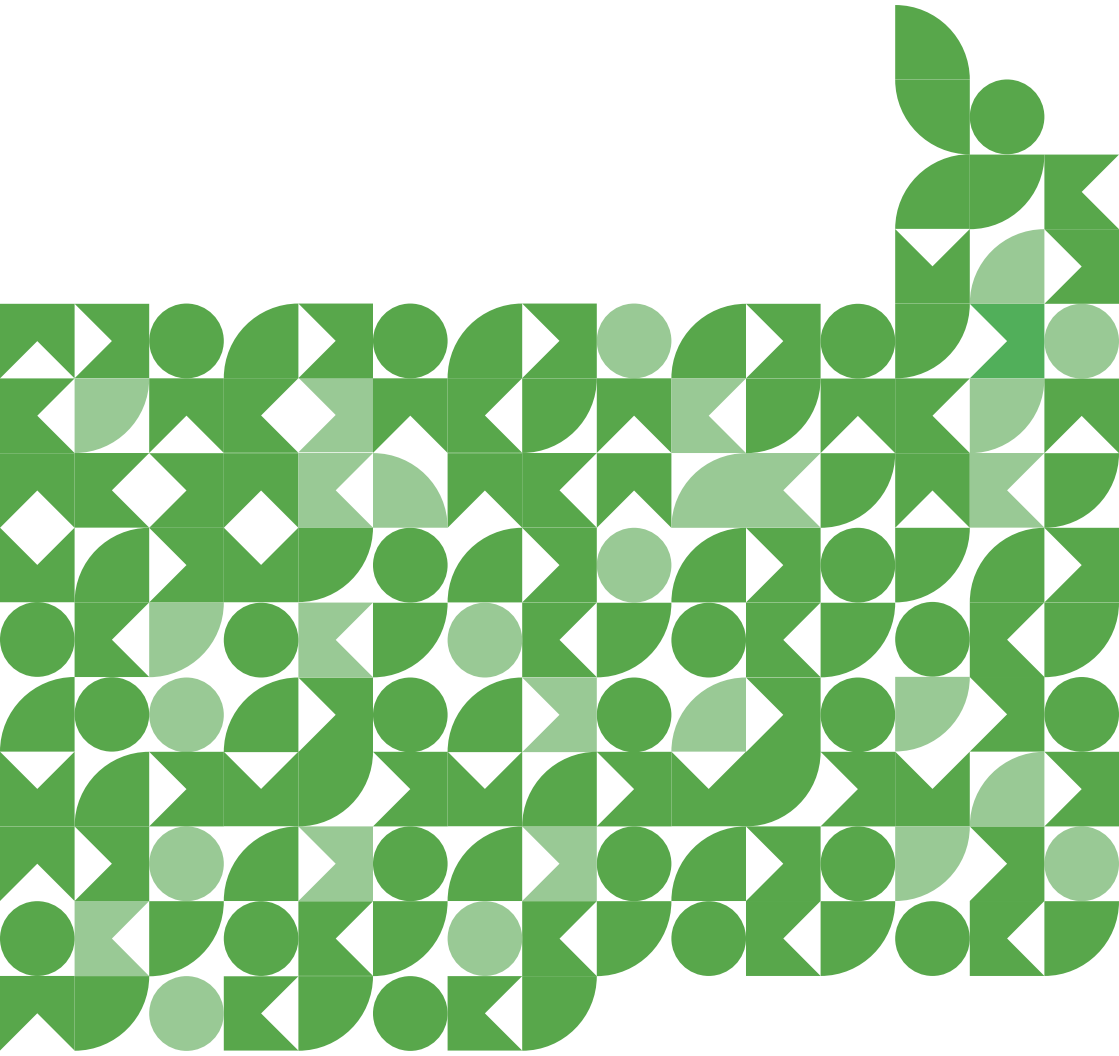
Living in such communities can kill great dreams,
and breaks in pieces what seems like a possibility.
Please let me find my level here in the slum,
that's where I belong : "for liquid finds their level".

I'm a strong woman and I can rise up,
Powerful leaders of tomorrow... wake up, wise up
Don't let our future break down

Let our voices be heard,
Because we care about our communities,
Encourage and help us to go and fulfil our dreams and ambitions,
Because our vision...
It's what makes us visible.

The greatest hope I have is to go back to my slum community,
to help them stand strong,
walk together to change that page
and build a better life for all of us, to reach that stage.

For life in the slums...still we rise.



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