

# UN HABITAT

STATE OF THE WORLD'S CITIES 2010/2011

BRIDGING THE URBAN DIVIDE



## BRIDGING THE URBAN DIVIDE: RIGHT TO THE CITY

UN-HABITAT's new report, *State of the World Cities 2010/2011: Bridging the Urban Divide*, recommends giving every resident the "right to the city" in which they live. In today's fast urbanizing world, the drive for democratic inclusion makes a rights-based approach to urban living an important force for social change.

Over the last 50 years across the globe 'the right to the city' was a mere theoretical and political concept referring to aspects such as enforcement, empowerment, participation, self-realization and determination. Today, in some countries and cities, the concept has come to mean that municipal authorities should protect all forms of human rights in a bid to bridge the urban divide. For this, authorities must ensure that city governments give equal priority to democratic governance, planning, management and implementation. This is critical if they are to hold fast to the human rights standards of non-discrimination, indivisibility, gender equality, gradual realization, non-retrogression, subsidiarity, solidarity and cooperation.

### EVOLUTION OF THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

Charting the rise of the concept of a right to the city, the authors cite the influence of non-governmental organizations, trade unions, and academic or research institutions, as part of campaigns to democratize municipal management.

In 2004, such social movements and organizations from around the world together devised a **World Charter on the Right to the City**, with support from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UN-HABITAT, among other agencies. In turn, this led to the adoption of local charters in a number of cities.

As an expression of the "deep yearnings" of urban dwellers to express their human rights to greater effect in urban areas, the right to the city is a safeguard against developments that exclude certain segments of society and a safeguard against the selective sharing of benefits and the marginalization that is rampant in cities today. Thus, the right to the city provides an adequate platform for action and the enforcement of human rights.

So far, few countries or cities have embraced the right to the city in their policies, strategies or legislations that seek to narrow the urban divide. Brazil was the first country to include a specific chapter on urban policy in its Constitution (1988). Adopted in response to years of dictatorship, this law required municipalities to guarantee the right to the city, to uphold the social function of cities and property and to make urban management more participatory and democratic.

### SOUTH AMERICA

- In the 1980s, the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre pioneered inclusion in municipalities with its participatory budgeting (**Orçamento Participativo**). Since then, over 70 cities worldwide have adopted this model in their own procedures
- Brazil's groundbreaking **City Statute** (2001) redefines the concept of land ownership as it asserts the social value of urban land
- In 2004, Porto Alegre introduced the **Local Solidarity Governance Programme** which further entrenched participatory budgeting in the municipality, with all residents invited to sit in forums where projects for the next city budget are proposed and prioritized. The programme is implemented across the city's 17 municipal subdivisions
- Argentina's third largest city, Rosario, has declared itself a "**Human Rights City**" with a formal commitment to openness, transparency and accountability. The municipality has opened itself up to scrutiny by a citizens' committee which monitors performance against international law on a continuing



- basis, making recommendations and organizing human rights training and awareness campaigns
- In 2008, in its new constitution Ecuador recognized the right to the city, the right to adequate and dignified housing, the right to a secure and healthy habitat, and the right to water and sanitation

## ASIA & OCEANIA

- Australia's **Victoria Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities** (2006) "recognizes that everyone is equally entitled to participate in, and contribute to, society and (the) community". The charter also sets out that "all individuals have equal rights to the provision of and access to Council services and facilities". The purpose of the 20 rights in the charter is to "assist all people to live in freedom, respect, equality and dignity"
- In India, in 2001, a municipal authority enacted a largely similar "**Citizens Charter**" that redefines its own functions in relation to residents' rights and expectations, with due regard for the need for reform and to hear public grievances

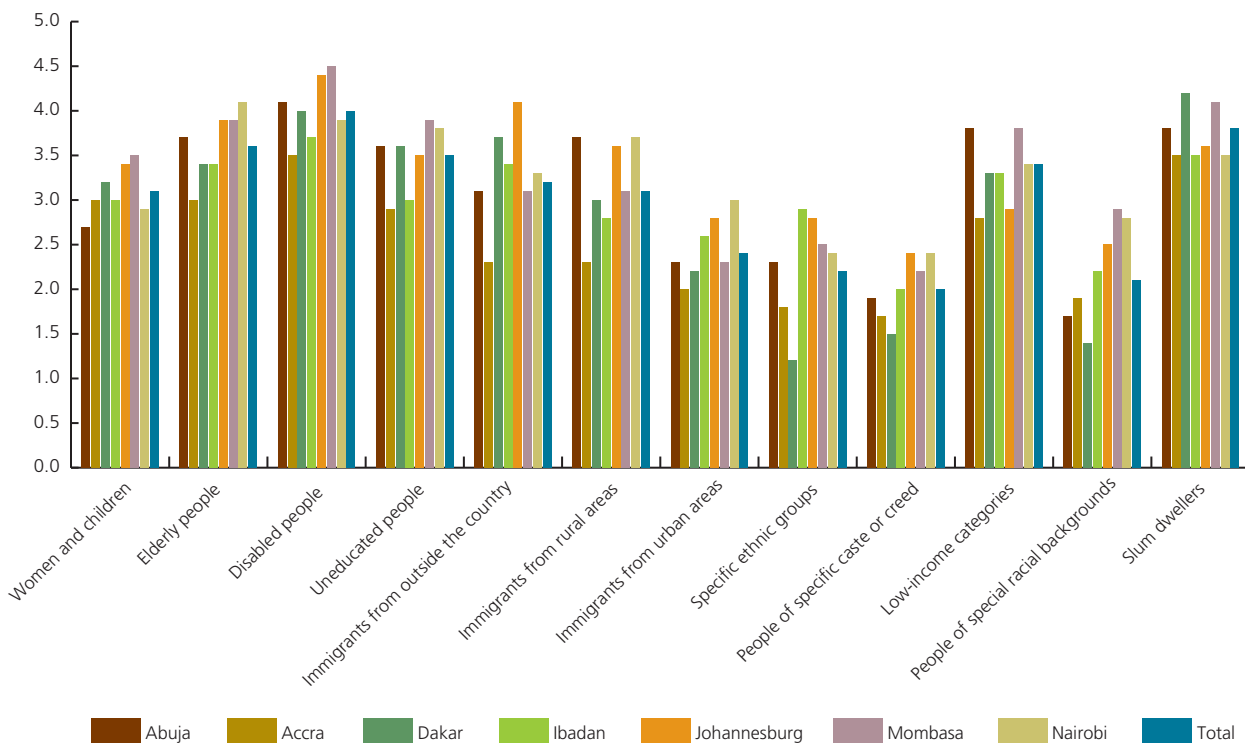
## AFRICA

- Relevant urban policies and practices integrate aspects of democratic governance that are either explicitly or implicitly consistent with the "right to the city" concept. For instance in Dakar, capital of Senegal, municipal leaders and local authorities in 2003 endorsed a "**Civic and Citizens' Pact**" that sets out mutual responsibilities among signatories. The pact commits municipal authorities to acknowledge the diversity of cultures and beliefs among all residents; conversely, community-based organizations have agreed to act in a socially responsible way

A number of cities in India, Ghana, South Africa, Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and other Latin American countries are also advancing the right to the city concept in a variety the social, economic, political and cultural spheres. However, progress is often slow and sometimes runs into continuous setback, as in Mexico and Argentina where efforts keep stalling because the four dimensions of the inclusive city are not involved at the same time.

In some cities and countries, particularly in South-Eastern and Eastern Asia, as well as North Africa, economic growth policies have gone hand-in-hand with positive social developments such as broad provision of basic services, improved literacy and life expectancy rates, and reductions in the prevalence of hunger and extreme poverty. These cities enjoy a decent quality of life. However, political rights and freedom are lagging.

### PERCEIVED DEGREE OF EXCLUSION OF UNDERPRIVILEGED GROUPS (SEVEN AFRICAN CITIES)\*



Source: UN-HABITAT, City Monitoring Branch, Policy analysis 2009

\* Average of ratings (on a scale of 0 to 5) by local experts responding to the UN-HABITAT 2009 survey.