

Concept Note

Second Urban Research Symposium of the World Bank on “Urban Development for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction”

Washington, D.C.
December 15-17, 2003

(Revised July 16, 2003)

Purpose and objectives:

Following upon the inaugural event of December 2002, this second Urban Research Symposium on “Urban Development for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction” again takes a long term, dynamic perspective of urban development as it relates to poverty within urban areas, as well as contributes to economic growth and poverty reduction at the sub-national or national level. The objectives of the Symposium will be to:

- explore recent and ongoing urban research with policy and operational relevance to economic growth and poverty reduction in developing and transition economies;
- devise a well-focused urban research agenda to guide future collaborative efforts in this area; and
- continue to foster networking and partnerships among international researchers working on problems of urban poverty.

Background:

The rural-urban transition and growth of urban settlements are processes that should favor increased productivity and opportunities for human development, thus contributing to increased incomes and enhanced welfare both at the national/sub-national level and within the urban areas themselves. Poverty is understood as multidimensional, encompassing both income and non-income factors. Raising welfare in all these dimensions requires developing a wide portfolio of assets—human, physical, natural, intellectual, financial, and social capital. Sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction are phenomena deeply affected by institutions (the formal and informal norms, values and rules determining relations in society), which determine how assets are shared and used.

Just as the benefits from urbanization can be realized through well-functioning institutions (markets, government and social networks) that promote wide access to assets, to voice and to information, many of the visible problems accompanying urbanization reflect institutional failures. In particular, urban development fails to live up to its promise for economic growth or poverty reduction when basic institutions are weak or lacking to promote property rights (e.g., secure tenure), to balance the interests of the many against the few, or to anticipate and commit to preparing for the future needs of a growing city.

The research of particular interest to this symposium would examine institutional factors of urban development that can drive change (for better or worse) in the conditions of urban or subnational poverty, for example:

- how critical information is made available and used in public discourse;
- how the interests and demands of the poor and deprived residents are expressed and represented;

- how coalitions and constituencies are formed to counter vested interests and advocate or negotiate pro-poor change; and
- how knowledge is translated into effective policies and actions to reduce poverty at a significant scale.

Although the emphasis will be on research that can inform and motivate policy and operational action, studies that are more descriptive than normative would be of interest especially if they exploit new data or methodologies. A combination of papers will be sought covering topics at different levels of analysis—the city, the neighborhood/community, and/or the household level. Comparisons among cities, and longitudinal studies tracking households or communities within a city over time, are especially encouraged. Both case studies and empirical research will be accepted.

Topics and themes of the symposium:

Papers are solicited addressing the topics and themes outlined below.

- Topic I. Strengthening the sources of (and reducing barriers to) urban incomes and livelihoods**
- Topic II. Enhancing welfare through human and social development, safety and security**
- Topic III. Housing and urban services**
- Topic IV. Land access and land use**

Each major topic would be discussed during the symposium under four sequential sessions. Each session would consist of at most four concurrent breakout groups organized to highlight one or more of the following crosscutting themes:

- Theme A: Urban economic growth and poverty reduction:** synergies and complementarities, or trade-offs and conflicts. What are the mechanisms determining transitional poverty versus chronic poverty in urban areas?
- Theme B: Information and planning:** methods and tools for assessing problems and issues, and conveying knowledge, to support strategic decision-making, proactive planning and implementation. How can longitudinal and disaggregated data collection be developed and institutionalized?
- Theme C: Governance:** relationships and processes for representation and balancing of interests and sharing of power—by different groups, gender, organizations. How can formal political systems and decision-making over resources become more responsive and inclusive, so that poor residents can act as full citizens?
- Theme D: Financing:** rules and instruments for public and private financing, including through fiscal means, commercial sources, and households' own payments. How can financing arrangements ensure an appropriate sharing of risks and benefits?

Some of the issues and types of research that would be of particular interest for the symposium are suggested below:

Topic I: Strengthening the sources of (and reducing barriers to) urban incomes and livelihoods

- Understanding income poverty in an urban context—appreciating urban costs of living, risks and vulnerabilities
- Diversification of livelihoods—labor pooling within the household, shifting between informal/formal sector work, combining rural and urban income sources
- Institutional constraints and labor market characteristics preventing effective use of labor and limiting job creation for the poor (demand-side issues)

- Overcoming barriers to labor force participation (supply-side)—lack of skills, contacts/social capital, transport, childcare; social or racial exclusion/stigma; vulnerabilities that make the poor workers “unreliable”, etc.
- Effectiveness of labor market policies targeting the urban poor (workfare, wage/training subsidies, job search assistance, etc.)
- Overcoming risks to financial security; effectiveness of financial safety nets and their integration into medium-term poverty reduction strategies

Topic II: Enhancing welfare through human and social development, safety and security

- The basis of urban social advantage—opportunities for women, evolution of gender roles; urban opportunities for learning (not just schooling, but literacy retention), exposure to positive social forces, attitude change, etc.
- Competing forces for urban social disadvantage (crime and violence)
- Factors driving disparities in health and nutritional status within urban populations
- Implications of HIV/Aids for urban poverty and urban management

Topic III: Housing and urban services

- In what respect are there cost advantages or "economies of scale" in providing basic services (infrastructural and social) to urban populations? What are the underlying efficiencies in serving urban settlements of different densities/sizes/layouts—and what are additional costs of not planning ahead of settlement, setting aside rights of way, etc.?
- What are the institutional implications and requirements of providing such services, whether through the public and/or private sector? Organizational and governance "efficiencies" and challenges, including those of maintaining operational quality of infrastructure and services, and achieving or sustaining related welfare outcomes over time
- Removing barriers that limit or distort housing supply and demand, drive up housing costs, or discriminate against the poor—e.g., regulatory and information constraints
- The persistence of housing submarkets: publicly financed social housing, informal (noncommercial) housing, and self-provision
- Housing finance alternatives and innovations
- Housing and infrastructure subsidies that work for the poor

Topic IV: Land access and land use: making the spatial growth of urban areas manageable and equitable

- Case studies of how cities have managed demographic and spatial growth, related especially to reducing poverty, promoting land access and secure tenure for the poor
- City case studies where constituencies have been mobilized and policies pursued and sustained with a long term vision of preparing for population growth (versus reacting *ex post*)
- Experiences with land use planning tools for proactive growth management, including to protect environmentally sensitive or hazardous land. Making land use planning adaptable to reflect actual growth and market dynamics; ensuring implementation and enforcement
- How data and measurement methods, particularly with respect to urban expansion and competition for land, can be used to inform public debate aimed at “getting ahead of the demographic curve”
- Economic and distributional implications of land institutions and policies (legal frameworks, property rights, regulations, zoning, information access, etc.)
- Alternatives to increase the supply of affordable serviced land

 **Comments on the Concept Note? Email urbansymposium@worldbank.org**